

AN ETHNOGRAPHIC STUDY OF THE URIKARA NAICKEN COMMUNITY OF TAMILNADU

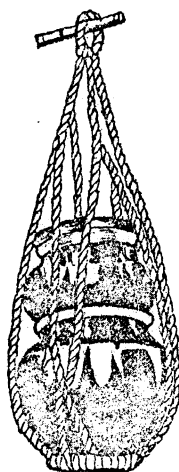


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Published By
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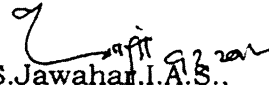
FOREWORD

Museums are the popular means to carry on the rich cultural heritage of India. The Ethnographic Museum displays ethnographic specimens dealing with specific cultures. The Government Museum, Chennai, celebrated as a cradle of anthropology has very rich ethnographic collections reflecting the life style and culture of different tribes of India. Ethnographic have acquired great importance in the study of the life and culture of select communities and help ethnographic research.

The present monograph entitled, "An ethnographic Study of the Urikara Naicken Community of Tamilnadu" resulting from the field studies of Tmt.M.N.Pushpa, Curator for Botany, Government Museum, Chennai is one such rare attempt, unraveling the ethnographic account of Urikar Naicken Community who inhabit the different districts of Tamilnadu. I congratulate her for the sincere efforts taken in preparing this monograph.

Indeed, the Department of Museums, Government of Tamilnadu is happy to bring out the ethnography of Urikar Naicken Community, a lesser known ethnic group identified within the Anthropological Map of South India, in general and that of Tamilnadu, in particular.

I fondly hope that this book will add to the respectable repertoire of knowledge especially of tribal communities among the scholars and students.


S.S.Jawahar, I.A.S.,
Principal Secretary/
Commissioner of Museums

PREFACE

Exploring of ethnography is carried out by means of identifying ethnic components of an ethnos with varying aspects. At present, the ethnographers have turned their attention from tribal world, in studying the contemporary, urbanized and industrialized ethnos as well.

The Urikara Naickens Community, a lesser known ethnic group identified in and around Tamilnadu is studied and brought out as a monograph entitled, "An ethnographic Study of the Urikara Naicken Community of Tamilnadu" which encompasses social structure, economy, religion, polity, literacy level, rites of passage and other allied facets of Urikar Naickens cultural matrix.

Despite the fact that the Socio cultural and the Socio-economic pressures exerted by the main stream society over the varied cultural domains of Urikara Naicken Community caused the Cultural change of switching over their traditional occupations from fabricating of "Uri ("pot stand of coir") to 'Sowrimudi' ("plaited hair"), their ethnonym, Viz., 'Urikara Naickens' remains intact till date.

In short, the present monograph delves deep in to the study and documentation of the Urikara Naickens – a linguistic minority who lead a semi-nomadic life, struggling for firm footing in the cultural substratum of Tamilnadu despite the various challenges encountered by them generation after generation.

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In writing this thesis I owe a special sense of gratitude for the able and timely guidance of Thiru M.Suryanarayana, M.A., Ph.D., Head of the Department of Social Anthropology, Sri Venkateswara University College of Arts and Sciences, Tirupati.

I am greatly thankful to the former Director of Government Museum, Chennai-8 Thiru N.Harinarayana, M.A., B.Sc., (Tech) and I am also indebted to Thiru N. Devasahayam, M.Sc., M.A., M.A., Dip Anthro, Dip. Museology, former Deputy Director, Government Museum, Chennai, not only for his help by providing with the necessary materials but also for his guidance.

I express my sincere thanks to the former Curator for Botany Thiru. A. G. Adikesavan, B.Sc., for all his possible helps and encouragement. Special thanks are due to Dr. C. Maheswaran, M.A., M.A., Ph.D., Director, Tribal Research Centre, Udhagamandalam for going through the first draft of this monograph. I would be failing in my duty, if I do not express my thanks to Thiru. Bakthan, Director, Board for Education for Liberation, Community Service Centre, Chennai-18, for helping me in carrying out my fields work successfully. I am also thankful to Mrs. Helen, Thiru. John and staff of BEL, for extending helps and co-operation.

I acknowledge the Registrar, Sri Venkateswara University, Tirupati for having permitted to publish this monograph entitled, 'Ethnographic Study of the Urikara Naicken Community of Tamil Nadu'. I also thank Prof. P. Sudhakara Reddy, Head, Department of Anthropology, Sri Venkateswara University College of Biological & Earth Sciences, Tirupati-517 502 for obtaining the necessary permission. I am thankful to Thiru. A. Periasamy, M.A. (Hist.), Dip. in Arch., Curator, Government Museum, Madurai for having provided the data on the Urikara Naickens of Mathichiyam area of Madurai District along with the colour illustrations.

I owe my Thanks to Dr. T.S. Sridhar, I.A.S. the former Principal Secretary / Commissioner of Museums for approving this book, to be brought out as a Museum Publication during his tenure.

I am much thankful to Thiru. S.S. Jawahar, I.A.S., Principal Secretary / Commissioner of Museums, for his encouragement, guidance and moral support in bringing out this publication successfully.

I dedicate this book to the Urikara Naicken Community.

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CHAPER -I

INTRODUCTION

The Urikara Naicken Community which is focused off in this ethnography is found distributed in Tirunelveli, Ramnad, Madurai, Coimbatore and Periyar districts and Madras City of Tamilnadu. It is believed that they have come from Telugu speaking areas since Telugu occupies a dominant place in their life. These people, however, knows Tamil and Kannada. It is also believed that they first came and settled in Dindigul from which they spread to the various districts of TamilNadu.

The need to study these Urikara Naickens was felt only recently by some organisations and hence no earlier material is available at present regarding this community. And my study was thus completely based on the first hand information collected during my field work at various places of Madras City by means of questionnaires and direct interviews.

It is rightly claimed that the building blocks of cultural anthropology

are the 'Ethnographies,' since all ethnographic studies are in one way or other have some important theoretical frame works implicit in their organisations.

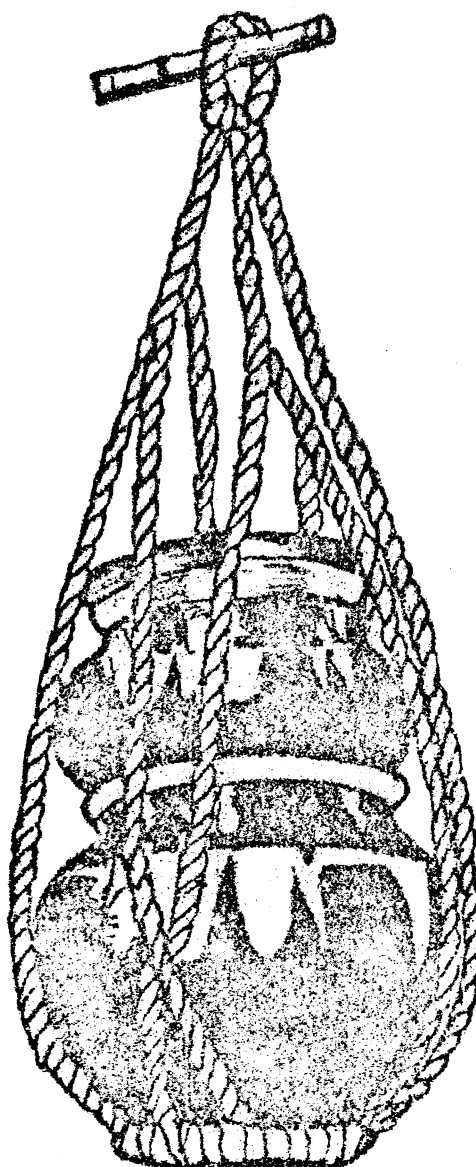
Early ethnographies as a whole were derived from the reports of explorers, missionaries and travelers. Exploring ethnography is by means of its ethnic components with its varying aspects.

At present, the ethnographers have turned their attention in studying the contemporary, urbanized and industrialized people also, though in the beginning ethnography was concerned with the study of primitive tribals, their tradition, religion, and customs. Thus, people whether backward or highly developed either small or large community fall within the scope of the ethnographer's outlook.

Now most of the ethnographic studies are carried out by employing

SYMBOL OF URIKARA NAICKEN COMMUNITY

The URI



modern field techniques, viz., objective and penetrating observation and key-informant interviewing after having established emphatic rapport with the informants.

It is unassailable fact that culture is dynamic and enduring one withstanding the changes of time. The present monograph is also focused towards the culture changes that have taken place among the Urikara Naickens Community due to their change of traditional occupation, namely, the production of 'Uri', the coir pot stand (and hence the ethnic name, the Urikara).

Thus, this field report on the ethnographic status of the Urikara Naickens presents a descriptive account of their family life, economy, religion, material culture, political organisation, education and other aspects of various cultural manifestations that one might think.

The Urikara Naickens show historical, cultural, political and economic situations of their own which were found to be reflected in their institutional frame work, social and economic organizational patterns, religious customs, artifacts and behavioural modes.

The life span of these people is characterized by their traditional life that is by means of their subsistence economy, political, skepticism, seclusion, illiteracy and social organisation. Elwin's theory of 'National Parkland', stressed on the isolation of Tribals to maintain their tribal culture. But, here the seclusion of these Urikaras is due to their inferiority complex arising out of their economic backwardness.

They are illiterates without much of communication and mass media facilities. They still follow their traditional way of life and this is evident from the absence of modern gadgets in their households. However, in the present day, due to general progress and development visible improvements in their standard of living is witnessed.

As in the case of other communities who live in a very crude existence, the Urikara Naicken Community also include itself in the same category. The Urikara Naicken Community has a peculiar life pattern and cultural practice that is different from other communities. This was evident when these people's activities

were keenly observed and whom were held direct interviews.

The usual socio-economic evils that are prevalent among other communities were prevalent among these people also. The delineation of the hard locality of this community was done through methodologies like participatory research and other observational methods which were quite sufficient to cover this.

Consequently, this study is concentrated on all the aspects including their socio-economic,

domains such as their settlement pattern, political organisation, income and expenditure pattern, nature of the trade, availability of raw materials, production and marketing facilities, social values, marriage laws, social stratification, and participation, leisure time hobbies, their habits, health status, environmental sanitation, leadership pattern and other activities.

Thus, in this present monograph, an attempt is made to cover almost all the aspects of the ethnography of the Urikara Naickens.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Meaning and interpretation of Urikara Naicken Community

For a better analysis and to get the appropriate meaning of the word Urikara Naicken, it may be split up as follows:

Urikara + Naicken = Urikara Naicken

URIKARAR

It is learnt that the Urikara Naicken Community, in ancient days, traded in coir products. Their main manufacture was hangers made of coconut fibre. These hangers are called 'Uri' in Tamil. It is used for suspending pots containing milk, ghee, butter etc., from the roof of the house.

They were also producing woolen ropes which are called Kaṁbalikayaru in Tamil. These ropes are used for fixing up beads for bulls, bullocks and cows. Besides this, they prepared vadam for pulling water out

of well for the irrigation purpose. Thus, they say, for one Boghum of Paddy if they provide two vadams, it was quite sufficient. They were, thus, engaged in producing ancilliary products necessary for the day-to-day life. Since these people were strictly involved in making Uri, these people were named as Urikaras in the olden days.

NAICKEN

In the medieval period, Vijayanagar Kingdom covered regions such as Mysore, Andhra, Tamilnadu. It is presumed that these people originated from the region of Vijayanagar Kingdom and since they speak Telugu more than Tamil and Kannada they were called by the name as Naicken or Naicker.

Therefore, on the whole, under these factors this community is said to be called by the name Urikara Naicken community.

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

It is quite interesting to study the Urikara Naicken Community who live of crude existence with primitive and peculiar cultural practices. These people need an organisation so that they could stand firmly. They have to be formed in such a way that they have a real mass base to fight for their rights and prestige and could have better scope to come forward in life and prosper.

The chief objective of this study is to find out the means and modes of their living, the reason for their economic backwardness and their sluggishness. These people have their own way of leading their life that is somewhat different from the well modernized and civilized people, and they have their own way of enjoying life. They have not yet lost their

original culture in the field of their occupation, family, marriage systems, religion, and other activities. Their socio-economic problems are given importance, since it forms one of the major reasons for their economic backwardness. Their ways of life in almost all districts of Tamilnadu are found to be the same.

The main objective of the study is to highlight the contextual and empirical aspects of family, marriage, kinship, and social change.

The next objective is to highlight the Urikaras, historical, cultural, political and economic situations that are reflected in their institutional frameworks, organizational patterns, customs, artifacts, language and other behavioral modes.

METHODOLOGY AND FIELD WORK

Methodology included two phases. During the first phase, the places for fieldwork were selected and in the pilot phases the questionnaires were prepared.

Certain places like Naduvakkarai, Avadi, Guindy, Villivakkam, Adayar, and Nagalcani were selected and these sites were visited several times and people were met at their own time and information were gathered regarding their customs, social organisation, economic organisation, and political organisation.

To begin with, the Urikara Community leaders were met personally so as to approach the community easily, and to keep a smooth and good rapport with them. The final report was given a scientific analysis that consumed much time.

The methods selected for my field study included direct interview, and non-participant observations. The field work was done personally, and the field was visited several times before the questionnaire was prepared. There was a mutual understanding emerged

among the people to answer the questions and thus a good rapport was maintained. They gave very good details regarding their occupation, religion and social organisation.

When I visited their places they explained in person about their socio-economic activities. The field trip was made at a time which was conveniently suitable for the people so they could respond to the questions. The simple people took pride in answering the questions. Questionnaires were prepared in such a manner so that almost all their familial as well as economic and religious activities were covered.

Questions were asked in such a manner that the people could easily understand and answer them. The old age people also took a keen interest in answering the questions. The study included almost four or five places. Being a simple life leading people they readily responded to our obligations. They were somewhat reluctant in telling about their caste people who are in a better position and who did not like to say that they belong to the Urikar Community.

When people were approached for this study, they raised their obligation to recommend their position to the Government in improving their standard of existence.

To know this Community better, it is important to understand their difficulties in securing the raw-materials and making the goods out of raw-materials. These raw-materials which required special processing involve much difficulty.

FIELD WORK

Field work was done extensively regarding their socio-economic problems. The chief and the most frequently occurring problems that are integrated with the Community were identified. And the survey work was done wherever possible. It was felt during the field visit that the community had to be well organized to overcome their struggles, and to face the life with challenges. It was clear that they formed the most neglected community who were deprived of their due rights.

It was found out during the field work that this Urikara Naicken Community though they originally

belong to Hindu religion has not been included in the State Government list of castes and thus is deprived of all the benefits given or provided by them to the backward class people and other weaker sections.

It was found out during the field work that a memorandum in this regard was submitted by the President of the Tamilnadu Urikara Naicken Community Association to the State Government stating some of their most felt demands.

When the field work was carried out these people usually gathered near their Community leader's hut and readily answered their problems or any other difficulty. These people answered in a very interest kindling manner. They maintained a good rapport as their feelings are not offended. Since the huts are not quiet sufficient to give room for all the family members most of the male members of the family are found outside their hut, resting under some shadey places quite safe and free from sun's heat, rain and flood.

Thus, the field work was completed easily without much difficulty.

AREA UNDER STUDY

The Urikara Naicken Community is spread throughout Tamilnadu in various districts such as Madurai, Chennai, Chingleput, Palani, Coimbatore, and Salem. They are distributed even in Chittor of Andhra Pradesh.

The area included for my study is Chennai. The Urikara Naickens are distributed at various places in and around Chennai as follows:

1. Naduvakkarai
2. Guindy
3. Raja Annamalaipuram
4. Beasant Nagar
5. Kodambakkam
6. Vadapalani
7. Adayar
8. Villivakkam
9. Nagalcani

The ethnographic status of these Urikars is almost similar in all the above cited places. The total number of families in each place varied from 15 to 50 families. Their social status, customs, religion, caste and other

familial ceremonies are similar in all these places.

In Avadi, as one enters the location of the Urikara Naicken Community beside the Mosque, there is a shed for parking some vehicles which forms a sleeping place for most of the Urikara people since they do not get air inside their hut. The place where the whole community dwells is called Eri karai (Lake Side). The place is named after a big lake near which they are present. Mostly they use this lake for the purpose of washing their hair for making the 'Sowrimudi'. But, recently they have been much objected by other people who also happen to use the water for drinking purpose due to the acute shortage of water that is faced by the people all over Tamilnadu, at present.

Their settlement is not usually arranged in a definite pattern. Sometimes when viewed from a distant place it appears as if they are scattered here and there. But, in some places the huts are arranged in a regular pattern

in a parallel row on either side. The entrances of the huts are seen facing each other. In Avadi, their settlement is very near to the shopping centre and thereby they have got other market facilities.

In Naduvakkarai, as we enter their settlement area, we find that it is situated between Vaishnava College and the beginning of Anna Nagar. Here also, the huts are arranged in a parallel row. The by-pass road leading to this Community is not properly laid.

In Villivakkam, these people are found distributed near the railway station next to the fish market.

In Shenoy Nagar, about 25 families are found near the main road.

In Kodambakkam, these Urikaras are seen near the bridge.

In Adayar and Beasant Nagar the Urikaras, distribution is in the interior sides.

In Nagalcani, the Urikars have made a permanent settlement. Here, their leaders have fought with the State Government and made the porambokku land, to realize 'Patta'. They were the first people who were successful to fight with the State Government and get it. Thus, they form a mile stone for the other Urikara leaders to follow it.

The study covered a vast area of settlements where these Urikaras are distributed.

CHAPTER- II

ORIGIN AND DISTRIBUTION OF THE URIKARA NAICKEN COMMUNITY

An analysis of the History of Tamilnadu indicates that there were no 'Naickens' of Tamil origin. Hence, there exists much disputes regarding their origin. It seems that these people did not originally belong to Tamilnadu. The language of these people is a mixture of Telugu, Kannada and Tamil. Telugu language is spoken more predominantly than the other two languages mentioned above. This shows that they may be from Telugu speaking regions of the Andhra.

Consequently, these people claim that their mother-tongue is Telugu and it can, therefore, be inferred that they have the origin from Andhra Pradesh.

At present, there is a great controversy regarding their ethnonym 'Urikara Naicken'. This is due to the fact that they are being called under varied names in different places. Thus, the names by which they are called in the various districts are noted, below to facilitate clear understanding:

1. In MADURAI DISTRICT

- a. Domban
- b. Dombara
- c. Ottan
- d. Kurangatti
- e. Pannikkaran
- f. Kallulimangan

2. RAMANATHAPURAM DISTRICT

- a. Kurangatti
- b. Pannikkaran

POSITION OF TAMIL NADU IN INDIA



- c. Kuruvikkaran
- d. Kallulimangan

3. COIMBATORE DISTRICT

- a. Panniandi
- b. Pachikkaran

4. TIRUNELVELI DISTRICT

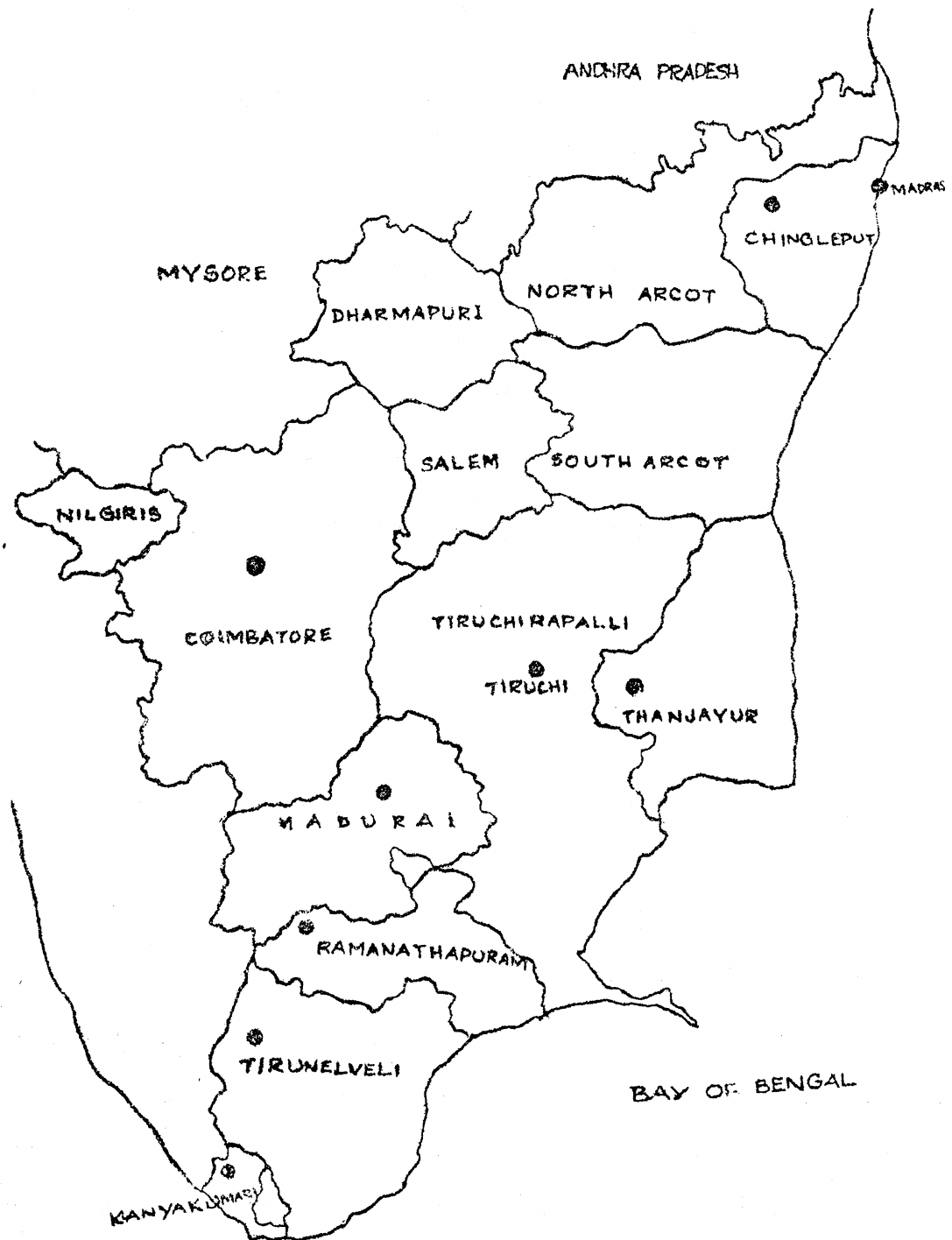
- a. Kazhuvan
- b. Kurangatti
- c. Pachaikkaran
- d. Naicken
- e. Karangakkaran

5. SALEM DISTRICT

- a. Paradesi
- b. Pidaran
- c. Kurangatti

The following folktale reveals us that how this Urikara Naicken Community acquired the other names. The Urikara Naicken people of olden days, as mentioned before, earned their livelihood by manufacturing coir products called 'Uri'. Thus, they were leading a nomadic life in trying to find a suitable market for their products to be sold out. So, when they are travelling like that they happen to settle at the outskirts of villages where the caste people of lower strata were residing. In certain places of these villages, these caste people were found rearing pigs and hence were called by the name Pannikkarans, and Panniyandis. So, when the Urikaras happen to settle in such villages along with these people, they also came to

DISTRIBUTION OF URIKARA NAICKEN COMMUNITY IN TAMIL NADU



be settled under the name of Pannikarans or Panniyandis. In course of time, the actual distinction between the original Pannikarans and the Urikara Naicken Community got eroded gradually and the people belonging to the Urikara Naicken Community came to be identified with the original Panniyandis. When the Urikara Naicken Community people in

later phase took to rearing pigs further made the identity closer.

Similarly, the Urikara Naickens, Community received other names too. Despite their being called by so many other names the people of this community prefer to be called by the name Urikara Naicken base on their original occupation of making 'Uris'.

DISTRIBUTION OF URIKARA NAICKEN COMMUNITY

The Urikara Naickens are distributed throughout the various districts of Tamilnadu. Thus, they are found to be distributed at the various districts of Tamilnadu as follows:

- I. Chennai
- II. Chingleput
- III. Madurai
- IV. Erode
- V. Thanjavur
- VI. Coimbatore
- VII. Tirunelveli
- VIII. Ramanathapuram
- IX. Tiruchirappalli
- X. Kanyakumari

I. CHENNAI

1. Guindy
2. Raja Annamalaipuram
3. Besant Nagar
4. Naduvakkarai
5. Kodambakkam
6. Vadapalani
7. Adayar
8. Villivakkam
9. Avadi

II. CHINGLEPUT DISTRICT (Undivided)

1. Chingleput
2. Thirukazhukunram
3. Nagalcani
4. Adam Nagar
5. Ennore
6. Thiruvallore
7. Avadi
8. Pattabiram
9. Thiruninravur

III. COIMBATORE DISTRICT (Undivided)

1. Udumalaipettai
2. Thali
3. Suganantha Colony
4. Selvapuram
5. Singanallore

IV. MADRAI DISTRICT (Undivided)

1. Andipatti
2. Kalikanayakanpatti
3. Chinnalampatti
4. Kovilpatti
5. Silapatti
6. Dharmathupatti
7. Chellammanpatti
8. Palanichettyatti
9. Veppampatti

10. Silwarpatti
11. Katnayakampatti
12. Kanniappapillaipatti
13. Pusali Goundanpatti
14. Pallavarayanpatti
15. Hanumanpatti
16. Odaipatti
17. Ammapatti
18. Usilampatti
19. Upparpatti
20. Palani
21. Uthamapalayan
22. Kambam
23. Ottanchatiram
24. Rajapalayam
25. Chinnamanur
26. Samayanallur
27. Dindigul
28. Periyakulam
29. Madhiseyam
30. Allimanayar
31. Madurai
32. Tenkasi
33. Acharithopu
34. Thiruparamkunram
35. Manchanayakar

36. Vedasanthur
37. Chellamman Dadi
38. Pumalikuntu
39. Melamadaï
40. Annaiyur
41. Vandiyur
42. Palamedu
43. Nilakottai
44. Alanganallore
45. Gudalore
46. Chokanathanpuram
47. Devaram
48. Allinagaram
49. Vathalagundu
50. Jeyamangalam
51. Alangiyan
52. Vadamadurai
53. Paraimedu
54. Puthur
55. Kuchanur
56. Valasai
57. Natten
58. Kalamedu
59. Kanakarpatti
60. Karuppurani
61. Kottaimedu

62. Seeman nagar

63. Ilamanur

64. Valaiyapatti

V. TIRUNELVELI DISTRICT (Undivided)

1. Alwarthirunagar

2. Pudupettai

3. Thiruchandur

4. Pudukotai

5. Thiruvaikuntam

6. Ambasamudram

7. Meenakshipuram

8. Mayilmannapuram

9. Thuthukudi

VI. RAMANATHAPURAM DISTRICT (Undivided)

1. Ponamaravati

2. Parambakudi

3. Sivangangai

4. Karaikudi

5. Srivilliputhur

VII. THIRUCHIRUPALLI DISTRICT

1. Manaparai

2. Punganure

3. Rajapettai

4. Iyyamangalam

VIII. THANJAVUR DISTRICT

1. Thannupalayam

IX. KANYAKUMARI DISTRICT

1. Nagercoil

X. ERODE DISTRICT (Undivided)

1. Vellakovil
2. Tharapuram
3. Uthukuli

CHAPTER-III

PATTERNS OF MARRIAGE

Marriage and family are the basic institutions of the society. This chapter is organized in such a manner so that they could highlight the empirical aspects of family, kinship and other social change. The operational concept and the inter-relationship between family, marriage, and social change were the foremost considerations while formulating the plan of this chapter. In the process of socio-cultural interactions, there was a continuous and long process of exchange. Many of these Urikaras are still retaining their original marriage customs. Some others have merged themselves a little with the socio-cultural system of the surrounding communities.

Marriage is a sacrament. The basic aim of marriage is to widen and stress the network of social relationship. The practice of cross-cousin marriage is prevalent among these people. Marriages by exchange, by negotiation and by elopement are

some of the major patterns of marriage prevalent among them.

The most prevalent and chief forms of marriage are: (1) Monogamy where there is a husband and a wife. (2) Polygyny where a man may live with his two wives. That is, he may marry another woman with the consent of his first wife. However, Polyandry is not seen among these Urikaras.

The reason claimed by the Urikaras for the practice of polygyny is barrenness of the first spouse. Hence, the author of the monograph concludes that getting additional hand for manual work (both for doing household work and making Sowrimudi) may be the real cause for the encouragement of the practice in this community.

The minimum age for marriage among the Urikara male is 21-23 years and that of the Urikara female is 17-19

years. Widow Remarriage and divorce are allowed up to a certain extent. However, the cases of divorce are very few. Generally, the marriage takes place with the consent of the boy and the girl although arranged by the parents. Before taking the initiative for the marriage, they ask for their respective clan. They have twelve clans under two moieties, out of which about six are having sibling relationship in which they cannot negotiate for marriage whereas with the other group of six sub-divisions they could have marital relationship and thus they initiate for marriage.

Thus, one of the members of the community Thiru Ponniah when enquired about his clan said that he belonged to Racherivadu. Similarly, when another member was asked he said that he belonged to Emanthirivadu. Thus, they could seek to have maternal relationship between their families. In dealing with the marriage proposal, thus, they were very specific about asking the details of which group they belong. Before they settle the marriage they observe a formal engagement. The bride and the bridegroom assemble with their family relatives and friends.

BETROTHAL CEREMONIES

The groom's party offers four betel leaves and four areca nuts, Rs.52.50/- a twenty five paise coin and a pot of liquor. All these items are placed in a 'Thambulathattu' and it is known as 'Parisam podarathu', which is supposed to be the bride-price. This is also exchanged over a pot of liquor. The promise is made by both the parties in the presence of the caste Panchayat leaders. A stone is given by the bride's party to the groom's party which denotes the establishment of the bond and also indicates that they will be as firm as the stone in their decision. Then, both the parties consume the liquor provided by the groom's party. The date of marriage is also fixed up on the same day.

Supposing after the engagement the girl elopes with another man or do not want to marry him, those who consumed liquor on the day of engagement assemble together and the bride's party will give back the bride-price and get back the stone. This is an indication that the engagement is broken and that the girl is free to be engaged to someone else. At the end of this occasion also they all take liquor.

In Mathichiyam area of Madurai District the practice of giving *Kuzhumakkaasu* i.e., the 'Community Share' is observed among the UrikaraNaicken community, which is collected both from the bride and the bridegroom side. This is distributed equally among the relatives of the bride and bridegroom who have come to offer the *parisam*. The *Kuzhumakkaasu* is given to them and it becomes their responsibility to solve any problem that arises after the marriage takes place.

When the date is fixed up for marriage they invite all their relatives by placing five betel leaves and five areca nuts. Since the number of relatives does not exceed more than hundred people, they usually arrange the marriage in their house itself. Unlike the other community marriages, purohit is not called upon to do the marriage. But, the rest of the customs like 'Ammi mithikarathu', and later seeing the 'Arunthathi star', crossing the pestle etc., were carried on as in other communities. Sometimes, the marriage takes place simply in temples also. They light two auspicious lamps in the temple. Before the marriage takes place they break coconuts and

camphor is lit before all the gods and goddesses of the temple. They do puja for all deities and to their caste deity Gangai Amman. Both the Bride's as well as the bridegroom's people buy saree for the bride. The cost of the saree may range from Rs.150 to Rs.250 depending upon their economic facility.

On the marriage day, the bride and the bridegroom are placed in two different huts made of green thatch. At the particular time of marriage they come together and in the presence of the Almighty, parents and other relatives the bridegroom ties the 'Thali' around the bride's neck. The 'Thali', is a chain made of black beads, bottu, and karugamani and if people could afford to get the gold kundu also they have it. The other women who have come to attend the marriage sing the auspicious songs connected with the marriage. And afterwards a brass vessel is passed on to the invitees and they in turn drop coins into it as gift to the couple. This money is later utilized to serve liquor and meal. Among their terms of marriage feast, pork forms an important item. After the marriage is over both the bride and the bridegroom go in a procession to each other's

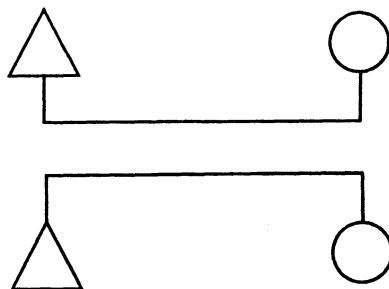
house. Since the marriage usually takes place either in the temple or in the house itself they do not have to walk long distances. The bride and bridegroom get the blessings of all the elders who have gathered there by touching their feet. They in turn would provide them with some money. In this way, these people celebrate the marriage ceremonies five to six days. Now they celebrate only for a day

In this connection, an interesting detail was given by one of the Urikaras community members. He said that he has made his marriage in a very simple manner. However, he said that he wanted to get rid of the practice of serving the liquor as a mark of agreement or belief in the marriage custom. Thus, in his marriage he said that he provided his relatives with artificially flavored soft drinks, instead of liquor. He had given Rs.25/- as 'Jadhi Panam' out of which 1/3rd of the amount was given by the bride's party as a mark of strengthening the marriage bond.

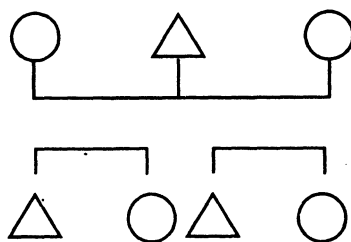
He further said that he got the blessings only from the Almighty, their Goddess Ellamman, and his own parents along with the bride's parents. He also said that he did not want to get the blessings of other relatives since according to their custom if they bless him they have to give some amount to him. Since they were poor, and have to borrow money from others for this purpose he did not wish this thing to happen and thus he said that he avoided it. However, he has taken the blessings of the Nattanmai, the Panchayat leader, as a mark of respect. Thus, he seems to be very enthusiastic in his idea of slowly removing the use of liquor among his community people in all the ceremonies. When the couple first goes to their respective mother-in-law's house, first they were taken 'Arathi' and thus, they start their life happily.

As regards the widow remarriage, if the woman is young without any child or having one child she is allowed to marry someone of her own community who is willing to marry her.

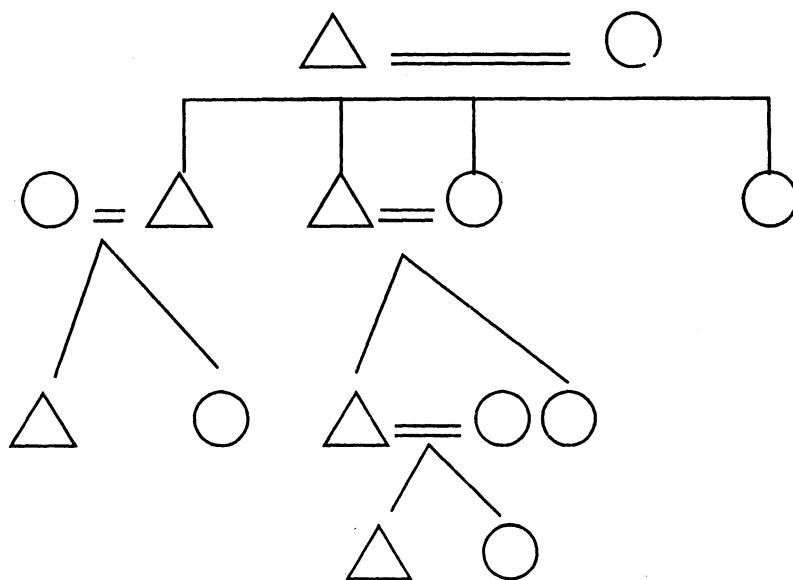
NUCLEAR FAMILY



COMPOSITE FAMILY



EXTENDED FAMILY



DIVORCE

Usually the quarrel between the spouses is settled amicably by the Panchayat leader, the 'Nattanmai'. When the husband and the wife are very specific in getting the divorce, then the case is settled by the Nattanmai. Even here, the liquor is served off as a mark of separation that they are free to marry anyone they like.

In this regard, another interesting instance has been reported about a member of the Urikar Community. It seems that he has married his mother's

brother's daughter. To begin with, he has led a very happy life, it seems. But, after three years, whenever he was in need of money he began to threaten his wife that he would divorce her unless she brings some money from her parental house. He used to keep quiet for a certain period after she brings some amount from her parent's house. Again, when he is in need of money he repeated the same act. Hence, whenever he seeks for a divorce the Nattanmai does not take it very seriously.

STATUS OF URIKARA WOMEN AFTER MARRIAGE

With her role confined to household and tending a helping hand to her husband Urikara women is usually viewed as a good working woman. Hence, an Urikara woman starts her work as a baby sitter, later fetches water, firewood and other petty works and gradually learns to look after all the household duties. Almost all Urikara women help in making Sowrimudi and thus form an important wage earning member of the family.

Usually an Urikara woman considers marriage as a permanent union of a man and a woman for the purpose of having children and to continue a line of generation through children born out of wedlock. It is believed, generally, that the adult men and women have the moral duty to get married in due course of times and beget children for maintaining the line of descent in the family. Sometimes, a married Urikara woman also goes out to sell the Sowrimudi.

The Urikaras all over Tamilnadu are divided into such endogamous groups that they cannot or do not have marital relations outside their own caste group. To a question on the possibility

of a girl being given in marriage to a boy from outside their caste group the father of the girl replied, "I am unwilling to give my flower like daughter to an unknown person like a wild tree from outside". The effect of such social distance relating to the establishment of kinship ties and endogamous relations limits the growth of diffusion from outside their own caste group.

After six months or one year if the bride is not conceived, she is usually questioned by the elders of the family. Supposing if she conceives immediately after a short period, then the exact date is noted by her mother-in-law or other women at home, or by her own mother. During the ninth month of pregnancy 'Valaikkappu' is performed 5-7 variety rice is send in this function.

Thus, the Urikara Naickens have a well established and interesting marriage system and customs with other important family organisations. Here, in this community, it is noted that the marriage system, family pattern and kinship are closely related with the wider social structure. It is, thus, quiet

URIKARA NAICKENS, FAMILY SYSTEM

interesting to note the simple marriage custom of these Urikara Naickens.

‘Family’ is the primary group and is closely related with kinship, marriage and property. It has a definite organisation of its own among the Urikaras. Family has been defined as a ‘group of two or more persons related by blood, marriage of adoption and residing together. As being the members of a family and interacting with each other, they perform certain roles. Among these Urikaras the family is closely linked with the system of descent and the lines of control, familial boundaries and types of marriage.

Within this Urikara Community, social system consists of a family which is patrilineal and patrilocal as well. Different kinds of family such as nuclear, extended and joint family are seen in their social system.

The family is patriarchal since the father exercises control over the family

and the descent is determined on the basis of male line. According to the Urikaras, the major functions of the family can be described as the normatively and legally sanctioned sexual union, reproduction, socialization, satisfaction of economic needs, economic security and satisfaction of affectional need.

In the case of a nuclear family, it consists of a husband and his wife with children. Usually, this type of family is found among the Urikaras. In the case of an extended family, it consists of one of the married sister or brother with them.

A joint family among these Urikaras consists of the parents, married brothers and their children with them. A man with two wives constituting a ‘Polygynous’ family is also found among them. The reason they say for this is to increase the man power and help in developing their economy since the women also forms

a major part in the making and trade of 'Sowrimudi'.

After the marriage both husband and wife may stay with the parents of each other or may live separately. Here, in their family system, they have a practice of following an agreement. That is, when they give their sister in marriage to a person, her daughter which is to be born should be given in marriage to one of her brothers. Supposing if there is only one brother and has already got married then marriage dealings of his sister's daughter's must first be consulted with the brother. If it is not carried out so, then there arises a serious quarrel between their families.

Similarly, the property of inheritance must also come through the male descent. Supposing if there is no male issue in the family then the inheritance of property belongs to their brother-in-law and never to the womenfolk.

An instance in this regard has been reported in the family of Thiru Ponniah. His father's own brother did not have any male issue and he had only three daughters. So, when he died his daughters did not want to give the property to anybody else. And they were found selling their property which their other family members did not like. Hence, they have sent a legal notice saying that they do not have any right to sell the property and the case is still going on, it seems.

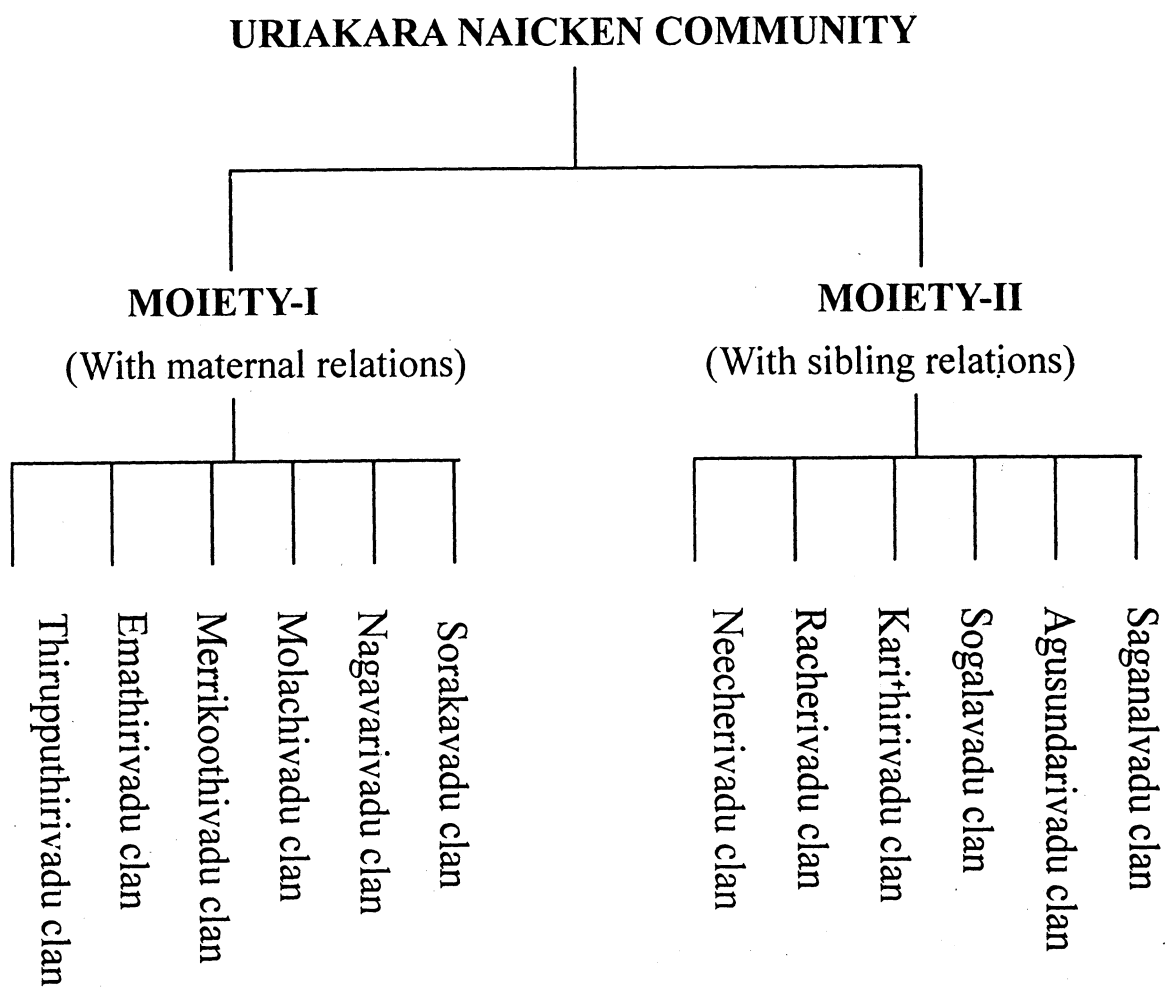
Thus, the family system forms a very interesting part of their life. Here, the authority or the head of the family is held by men that is said to be the 'Patrilocal residence'. The extended family is more or less similar to the joint family. Besides this, a widow or divorced women is allowed to remarry and thus forms a compound family. They give equal priority in discussing certain family matters to both men and women.

CHAPTER-IV

MOIETIES AND CLANS AMONG THE URIKARA NAICKENS

The Urikara Naicken Community is divisible into two major divisions as Moiety-I and Moiety-II. Each Moiety is again divided into six clans. All the clans of one Moiety are considered to have maternal relations and so they cannot intermarry among themselves while the entire clans of the other moiety is considered to have sibling relations and hence also cannot have marital ties within themselves. Rather, any clan of one moiety can have marital ties with any clan of the other moiety. From this we could infer that the social organization of Urikara Naickens exhibits Clan exogamy. But, their marriage is endogamous which takes place within the Community.

Each clan derives its name from the name of its forefathers. Each family which accepts the clan as such believe that the family deity usually remains in each household for the well-being of the members of the family. The offspring's also automatically have the clan of their father by birth. However, the daughters have to accept the clan of their respective husbands after marriage. No person from a clan is allowed to perform or participate any rituals of another clan. Thus, observance of rituals is restricted to the members of a clan. And others are considered alien to that set up.



KINSHIP

Within the patriarchal joint family of the Urikara Naicken Community, there is a series of varying degrees of closeness in attachment and relationship. This relationship could be clearly seen from their Kinship Organisation. Cross-Cousin marriage is commonly seen among these Urikaras. This relationship help to show two separate kinship groups in the genealogical line, namely, 'the primary kins' and the 'secondary kins'. Both consanguineal and affinal kinship are followed by the Urikara Naickens. The marriage relations and descents are

determined within the frame work of kinship system. Thus the kinship system forms a unilinear role of descent and consequently the kinship seems to be closely associated with the family.

The Urikara Naicken Community is based on cohesive bonds of kinship. The kinship ties exist both within one's patrilineal kin and matrilineal kin. The interpersonal relationship of their entire social organisation depends on their consanguineous and affinal kinship ties.

The various kinship nomenclatures that are used by the Urikara Naickens are as follows:

CONSANGUINEOUS KIN:

Naina (Male)

Fa

Amma (Female)

Mo

Their seniority to represent whether they are younger or elder is denoted by adding prefixes the 'Chinna', or 'Betha' respectively. Thus, mother's elder sister is called 'Bethamma' and younger sister is called 'Chinnamma'.

CONSANGUINEOUS KIN:

Mama (Male)

Fa Si Hu;

Mo Br

Atha (Female)

Fa Si

Mo Br Wi

AFFINAL KIN:

Mama (Male)

Hu Fa

Wi Fa

Atha (Female)

Hu Mo

Wi Mo

EGO'S II ASCENDING GENERATION:

Here, the classification is made for the maternal and paternal grandparents.

Thatha (Male)	Avva (Female)
Fa Fa	Fa Mo-Nainamma
Mo Fa	Mo Mo-Ammamma

EGO'S GENERATION:

Here, the terms are used for siblings and parallel cousins. The terms are separate for male and female. The same is also prevalent for cross-cousins and affinals.

CONSANGUINEOUS KIN**KINSHIP TERMS**

MALE	ELDER	YOUNGER
Br	Anna	Thambudu
Fa Br So	„	„
Mo Si So	„	„
Fa Si So	Bhava	(called by name)
Mo Br So	„	„
FEMALE	ELDER	YOUNGER
Si	Akka	Chella
Fa Br Da	„	„
Mo Si Da	„	„
Mo Br Da	Maradalu	Maradalu
Fa Si Da	„	„

AFFINAL KIN:**KINSHIP TERMS**

MALE	ELDER	YOUNGER
Si Hu	Bhava	Maradhi
Wi Br	„	(called by name)
Hu Br	„	Maradhi

FEMALE	ELDER	YOUNGER
Br Wi	Vadina	Maradalu
Wi Si	Maradalu	,,
Hu Si	Pinni	Vadina

A man calls his wife as 'bharya'.

Similarly, a woman calls her husband as 'Intiayana'.

EGO'S I DESENDING GENERATION:

KIN CATEGORIES

KINSHIP TERMS

CONSANGUINEOUS KIN:

MALE

So	Koduku
Br So (man speaking)	Pethana koduku
	Thambudu koduku
Si So (woman speaking)	Akka koduku
	Chella koduku
So So	Manamudu

FEMALE

Da	Kuthuru
Br Da (man speaking)	Pethana koduku
	Thambudu koduku
Si Da (woman speaking)	Akka koduku
	Chella koduku
So Da	Manamaralu

AFFINAL KIN

KINSHIP TERMS

MALE

Da Hu	Alludu
Wi Br So	Bhava
Si So	Mena Alludu

FEMALE	KINSHIP TERMS
So Wi	Kodilu
Wi Br Da	”
Hu Si Da	”
Si Da	Menakodalu

EGO'S II DESCENDING GENERATION:

Offspring of sons and daughters are called 'Manamudu', and 'Manamuralu'.

MANAMUDU	MANAMURALU
So so	So Da
Da So	Da Da
Fa Br So So	Fa Br So Da
Fa Br Da So	Fa Br Da Da

The younger ones are called by their names whereas the elders are addressed by respective terms, according to their age and sex.

Si Hu Fa, WiF2, Mo Br, Mo Br So are called by the term 'Mama'.

Similarly, Wi Mo, Hu Mo, Mo Br Wi, Mo Br So Wi, are called by the term 'Atha'.

The daughters of 'Mama' and 'Atha' are cross-cousins and become a 'Menarikan', that is a potential wife to a male ego.

Si So and Br Da, or Si Da and Br So can marry and are called Mama allude or Maradulu. Thus, the cross-cousin carriage can take place among the Urikara Naicken Community. The parallel cousins are called by the term 'Anna', if elder and 'Thambudu', if younger.

In the case of a girl, she is called by the term 'Akka', if elder and 'Chellalu', if younger. In the case of cross-cousins, they are called by the terms 'Maridhi', and 'maradalu' for male and female respectively. Uncle-niece marriage is also practiced by these people even though they prefer cross-cousin marriage.

KINSHIP BEHAVIOUR

The kinship behavior varies depending upon the persons. Thus, the father tends to have more affection towards his son rather than his daughter, because most of the time he is helped by his son in attending to outer works. Similarly, a mother tends to have more affection towards his daughter, since her daughter helps in looking after children and other household duties. Another reason is that a daughter once she gets married goes to her mother-in-law's house and thus the mother has more affection towards her. Whereas it is different in the case of a son, who may live with his parents. But, in most of the cases it was found out that the parents themselves keeps their son separately due to lack of space and other financial problems.

In the case of a family, a man holds a respectable place since he is the head of the family. Usually in family matters, the decision is taken by the elders whereas in most cases it is taken by the joint decision of the husband and wife, that is to say that they understand

each other well. But inspite of it, sometimes there arises quarrels where either the wife or the husband has to tolerate each other, but, among the Urikaras it is mostly the women who tolerate their husband. If the problem goes to the extreme end, then it is solved by the elders. A man shows greater respect towards his father-in-law and mother-in-law. Similarly, a woman shows greater respect towards her father-in-law and mother-in-law. In this community, both the husband and the wife show greater respect towards each other's parents. Usually, a man moves closely with his sister's husband as well as his wife's brother. He calls his sister's husband by the term 'Thambudu' when he is younger to himself. In the cases where the wife's brother is elder, he is called by respectable terms. However, a man is more jovial when the sister's husband or wives brother is younger to himself.

Sometimes, the wife gets into quarrel with her husband's unmarried sister. However, it is solved amicably.

Very rarely the husband gets into quarrels except in financial and other trade matters. Bridegroom's sister guides the bride during marriage. The children are very much attached towards their mother's brother and also

towards their respective grandpa's and grand-mother's (parents of both the husband and the wife). Thus, the correlation between the kinship behavior and terms could clearly be seen among this Community.

KINSHIP OBLIGATIONS AND RESPECTS

Among the Urikar Community, the whole family members, irrespective of age and sex, show their respect to the family head. It is seen that even after the death of their elders they show their respect by observing death rituals and by other social activities. The kinship terms are very much used by these Urikaras according to the consanguineal and affinal relationship, within which they lead their life. The life remains normal as far as there is no misuse of their social norms. If anybody breaks the social norms, especially the kinship relations like

having illegal relationship, the panchayat will take the necessary action against them. In such cases, the person involved is generally excommunicated from the society. At the same time if a man dies his wife is allowed to remarry if she is young or else she may live with her parents. If she possesses a child she or he is also brought up by her.

Thus, the Urikara Naicken Community people are leading their life within the concentric circles of consanguineal and affinal relationship.

CHAPTER-V

ECONOMIC ORGANISATION

No society has ever been static and the socio-cultural change is a relative concept. With literacy as a requirement for better employment opportunity, the Urikara Naickens who are not much educated lag very much behind which forms the first of the pull-factors. The Urikara Naickens who are less literate and semi-skilled, thus, could engage only in a few occupations. The lack of such a pull-factor has been evidenced well by the uneducated Urikaras. These people were asked questions about the deficiencies felt most acutely by them in their work. They were specific about the deficiencies in their localities and they exercised multiple choices in this matter. Among the Urikara Naickens both men and women are classified as earning members, since both the sexes are engaged in making of Sowrimudi for their living. Except for a few, the Urikaras are mostly lagging in occupations like agriculture. However, these people are doing transplantation, irrigation and other agricultural work

for daily wages in Madurai and other districts of Tamilnadu. None of them are found to be included in the salaried class and white collar jobs. The overall larger percentages of the Urikaras are found to be involved in the making of Sowrimudi, which earns them a major income.

OCCUPATIONAL MOBILITY

The Urikara Naickens occupational mobility, when given deep insight, showed that their ancestors started the occupation of making 'Uri' (coir pot stand) and 'Vadams' (ropes) for agricultural purpose. But, later slowly during the second or the third generation they have gradually taken over their present trade of making the Sowrimudi, since the trade of Uri did not find much scope. However they have achieved their traditional name Urikaras from their ancestors, occupation of making Uri, and still they are retaining the same name.

In the present day, besides their traditional occupation of making the Sowrimudi they have also taken over the work of plastering the plastic-buckets since what they get out of making the Sowrimudi is not sufficient to maintain their economic subsistence.

INCOME GROUPS

The distributions of income groups among them were recorded. Their monthly income rarely exceeds Rs.300/- Generally, depending upon their luck they are able to sell out their Sowrimudi. Sometimes, they are able to get Rs.30 or more per day and at other times not even Rs.10/-. Sometimes, they are unable to sell even a single Sowrimudi.

Data elicited regarding their monthly income suggested that what they earn is comparatively low. The Urikara Naickens who are distributed at various places of Tamilnadu, thus, do not lead a very prosperous life, since what they earn is not sufficient to hold even for two or three days. Even though both the menfolk and womenfolk of this Community are supposed to be the bread-winners what they earn is very low since their trade does not find much scope in the present days.

At present in the Mathichiyam area of Madurai District, the Urikaras sell the Sowrimudi for a price ranging from Rs.100 to Rs.300/- Now-a-days they take up the work from the private

RANGE OF INCOME IN NADUVAKKARI AND AVADI

Sl.No	Number of people	Range of income (in rupees)
1.	35	200
2.	25	100 – 150
3.	20	50 – 70
4.	15	30 – 40
5.	10	10 - 20

concern also which pays Rs.200/- for menfolk and Rs.150/- womenfolk to members.

OCCUPATIONS

Previously, their trade was making the Uri, Vadams and the woollen ropes called Kambalikayaru. In places such as Thanjavur and Kumbakonam the making of these woollen ropes for decorating the horns of cows and buffaloes and also for ornamental purpose is still being carried on as their main occupation. When people were using vadams for pulling water before the advent of the motors for agricultural purpose, the Urikara Naickens were involved in making these ropes. They informed that the ropes they made out of hand are much stronger and better than the machine made ropes. They further said that for a 'Boghum' of paddy they supply only two such ropes which were found to be quite sufficient. For the supply of these ropes they are paid in kind, namely, six measures of Ragi.

While the women fabricate 'Pirimanai' and 'Uri' in the day time, besides attending to their household duties, the men also assist them in these

works. Thus, the whole family is found to play their roles in the economic organisation.

Due to industrialization the machines and motors started replacing the olden methods of drawing water by ropes. Thus, the Urikara Naickens gradually stuck on to the other trade, viz., making of the Sowrimudi.

The Urikara men and women carry out the plaiting of Sowrimudi. They usually buy the hair from the whole-sale dealers in Parrys Corner near Flower Bazaar. The hair is sold to them for a higher rate since the whole-sale dealers buy the hair from the TirumalaTirupati Devasthanam and bring it here and sell for profit. The poor Urikara people could not afford to get it for bigger sums and hence they buy for small amounts. They make two or three Sowrimudis a day and then they dye them. Even for dyeing they have got some troubles since they are not allowed to wash the hair in the ponds, since the people of other castes objects that the water would be polluted. Since the hair requires large amount of water for cleaning they often find it very difficult to apply the dye.

The decoction of *Terminalia chebula* commonly called as Chebulic Myrobalan (Kadukkai) is used to dye the hair.

Once they get the entire stock of the hair, they sort it out as small and larger strands. Sometimes, the investments of a family may be around Rs.65/- to Rs.75/-. However, they prefer to buy it up to a maximum of Rs.300/- where two or three families may join together.

Each and every family gets the hair and makes the Sowrimudi separately. Usually the men go out for selling the Sowrimudi. They have got two handmade comb like apparatus by means of which they plait the hair. However they do not make fashionable

hair styles. They colour the hair mostly with black dye. Sometimes, they were able to sell two or three Sowrimudis within a day.

The men folk usually go out in the morning and come only late in the evening. They informed that previously their work is to make Uris. And slowly their younger generation has taken over the work of making the Sowrimudi. They do not look down upon their occupation. No special training is given for their children by their elders in this regard. Generally, due to continuous practice of plaiting, they are able to finish two or three Sowrimudis within a day. The children are also very helpful to their parents in their works.

THE EXISTING SOCIO-ECONOMIC PROBLEMS

About 60% of the Urikara Naicken Community who are found distributed throughout the various districts of Tamilnadu such as Madurai, Tirunelveli, Ramanathapuram, Coimbatore and Nagercoil districts have come to Chennai city in the hope of getting better marketing facility to sell their products, viz., 'plaited hair' called Sowrimudi. However, some of the people are found distributed in Chittoor of Andhra Pradesh and a few are found in Kerala also.

They have started settling in Chennai City for the past 15 to 20 years. To begin with, they had the occupation of twining of 'Kambalikayaru' and making Vadams. With the advent of industrialization and modernization this trade did not find much scope. Hence, they have started their present trade of making the plaited hair. However, as a means of additional income, they are still engaged in the work of making the woollen thread known as Kambalikayaru which they sell it in shops. This kambalikayaru is mostly used for tying the horns of cows and buffaloes for ornamental purpose, and also as a means of driving out the evil powers. Even men wear this kambalikayaru in their wrist.

Hence, even at present one can see the Urikara Naicken men selling this Kambalikayaru.

The present trade of selling the Sowrimudi, however, involves more investment on raw materials, expenditure and transport where they get a profit just sufficient to further their trade and meet their basic family expenses.

Moreover, the educational standard of this Urikara Naicken Community is very poor. About 76% of them are illiterates and the rest have not even reached their primary schooling also. As regards their social participation, majority of them never established close acquaintance with other communities. This is because of their inferiority complex arising out of their socio-economic backwardness and other traditional reasons.

This Urikara Naicken Community is mostly living in a poorly constructed thatched hut surrounded by unhygienic environmental condition. Among these Urikara Naickens, sanitation presents a grave problem as these people are accustomed to the practice of using the

sides of small stream or tank just outside their habitation area as open air latrines. Since the whole of Tamilnadu, at present, is facing acute water-shortage the Urikaras also has to face it. The most common disease that is prevalent among these Urikaras is the stomach disorder. This is because they are making the plaited hair as well as cooking in the same places since there is no adequate place to do them separately. Besides this, their finger tips are corroded as a result of sterilizing the hair with chemicals. Majority of them are found to resort to indigenous medicine and thus they occasionally go to a doctor when they become sick.

In spite of their illiteracy they have their children being inoculated. This may be due to the fact that they have come to settle in the city side where they come in contact with other people. They have taken this safety measure for safeguarding their children against any disease as advised by the doctors.

During their leisure time they are engaged in some useful activities such as gardening, honey collection and hunting. It is found out that in the earlier days these Urikaras seems to have hunted some wild animals. For capturing smaller birds they have a special technique. They

extract the milk from the 'Arasa Maram' *Ficus religiosa* (The Peepal tree) which they leave to segregate. After that it forms a thread like form to which they attach some insects to attract the attention of the smaller and sometimes bigger birds also. Once the bird comes into contact with this pray the Urikaras are able to trap it easily. But, at present, due to the deforestation they are unable to hunt wild animals. However, they still capture the birds whenever they find time by the method as said earlier. They have an iron cage for the captured animals like cats & mongoos.

Consuming liquor is a common practice in this Urikara Naicken Community. Liquor is inseparable from their day-to-day life and other familial ceremonies. Be it a marriage or betrothal or death they take liquor. Once they keep liquor and exchange hands over it, the Urikara Naickens greatly respect it as a vow and a mark of promise. They never over go this promise made over a pot of liquor. Sometimes even the womenfolk are found consuming liquor.

Thus, it was found out that the socio-economic conditions of these Urikaras are not upto the standard to bring their life up.

DIFFICULTIES FACED IN THE TRADE

Government has helped the Urikara Naickens in the beginning, by giving them some interest free loans up to a sum of Rs.10,000/-. But, later it has completely stopped giving such loans by saying that it is facing heavy loss. Thus, the Urikaras were unable to get the financial help from the State Government. Consequently, they are unable to get the hair which is sold out as lease for bigger amounts. These Urikaras say that at places like Tirutani, Tirupati, where the temple authorities sell out the stock of hair by tenders it is taken as a whole by the whole-sale dealers. In turn, the whole- sale dealers sell the hair for considerably higher price in retail. So, by the time it reaches the Urikaras, hands they have to pay double price. Rarely, the Urikaras are also getting the raw-material at Tirupati itself by their savings.

Hence, they wish that the State Government should pay considerable attention to their pathetic state and do something favourable for them. At present, the problems of the Urikaras are dealt with by the Social Welfare

Department which functions under the control of the Secretary to the Tamilnadu State Government.

To know the Ethnographic status of this Community it is highly important to understand their difficulties faced by them in their trade, which are listed below:

(1) The first difficulty lies in securing the raw-materials. Though there are provisions made for this community to purchase the raw-material, viz., hair at a much cheaper rate from the Devasthanams, the real situation is not so. Rather, they are forced to buy the hair at a higher rate from the dealers who purchased from the Devasthanams on auction basis.

(2) Their next problem is at the level of making the produce out of the raw-materials. At this stage the processing and plaiting of hair were done continuously with tremendous patience. Moreover, they are denied of any technical help whatsoever. As a result of this, they are forced to work about twelve hours a day. In this community, constantly the women go on doing the household as well as

plaiting Sowrimudi work and the men assist them and take the responsibility of selling the finished products. Since the work is being carried out in their home itself simultaneously the food is prepared by these people; these people mostly suffer from diarrhoea, due to their food getting hair filaments into it. In addition to this, the use of chemicals for sterilizing the hair, leads to their finger nails getting the stain erosion.

The men folk face a great difficulty in marketing their produce which involves a lot of travelling leading to an excess physical strain. Besides that, the separation of the shorter hairs from the longer ones takes much of their time. Then, they are sterilizing the hair with chemicals. These Urikaras normally make black coloured Sowrimudis. Occasionally, they make white colour and brown coloured hair also. The womenfolk are also good at making these Sowrimudis. But, at present this profession is swiftly losing its scope due to the modern beauty parlour and other fashionable hair dressers. Thus, the Urikaras are badly in need of the following requisitions from the State Government:

1. They should be given some job-oriented training.
2. For the improvement and development of their trade, the State Government should provide them with loans free of interest.
3. From the temples of Government undertaking, they should get a part of the hair of the devotees free of cost as Government aids.
4. In the wake of fashionable beauty centers, since their profession does not find much scope, they should be provided with some alternative job opportunities.
5. The State Government, in providing job opportunities for the less educated people, should take into consideration the illiterate Urikara Naicken people also.

The Urikara Naicken Community has a peculiar cultural, political and economic situation. These experiences are bound to be reflected in their institutional frame works, organizational patterns, customs, artefacts, language and behavioural modes.

SCOPE OF THE TRADE OF SOWRIMUDI

In these modern days people do not like to have Sowrimudi because of the latest beauty clinic and beauty parlours. So, now the need for Sowrimudi is felt less by the people. Moreover, at present, it has become a fashion to have short-cut hair. Hence, a person does not care even if they have short hair. Now a days the woman does not grow long hair, and instead prefer short-cut hair more. A short jovial expression was given for this. As the finance of the people is going weaker day by day and as we have to spend more on oil and other hair scents, it is preferable to have short-hair so that the expenditure to be spent on that aspect may be less. And another comment passed was that since 60% of the working women find lesser time to comb their hair properly and hence they get lice and other problems. So, they prefer shorter hair instead of long ones to overcome these difficulties.

In such a situation the profession of Sowrimudi does not find itself as a prosperous occupation. The upper class and middle class people are now

found in the habit of going to beauty clinics. The short-hair is not at all a minus point for most of the womenfolk. They could design their hair dress in whichever manner they like by asking a hair beautician to decorate their hairs. Amidst such luxurious parlours, the profession of Sowrimudi making is not mostly welcome.

However, these Urikara Naickens are still continuing their profession of making the Sowrimudis, as the lower income people could not afford to spend so much for hair dressing. Moreover, the elderly women from the middle class do not like to go to beauty parlours, to beautify their hair. Hence, they buy these Sowrimudis and use them on the occasion of marriage and other important ceremonies.

The slum people who could not afford to spend so much also use the Sowrimudi. We could even say that it is because of the people of, lower income and middle income group this profession of making the Sowrimudi is still flourishing.

Under such conditions it is preferable that these Urikara Naickens should be given some vocational training. In making modernized, fashionable hair styles, though they could not compete with the beauty parlours, still they could improve their occupation and thus gradually improve their standard of living also.

In this connection, the BEL the Board for Education for Liberation is trying to take active steps to teach the Urikaras of how to make hair styles by giving them a short-duration training course in making out these hair styles. Once they start doing modern hair styles, they could try to improve their sub-standard life.

In this regard, they are requesting the State Government to help them by lending Government loans free of interest. Further, they insist that they

should get a part of the hair which is given by the devotees at the Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams free of cost. They also insists the Government that since their work is not able to flourish in these modern days, they should be given some alternative job opportunities. For this, they demand that for the job opportunities with minimum of qualification, they should be given priority.

In India, ever since planning was first initiated the tribal development and rural development have been attracting the attention of planners. Various administrative measures have been adopted and tried with a higher concentration of finances on rural and tribal areas. Thus, the Urikara Naickens who are backward in all aspects of life must also be provided with some improvement measures.

SUGGESTED METHODS FOR THE ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT OF URIKARA NAICKENS

To paraphrase Jawaharlal Nehru's words, "It is not statistics nor even the amount of funds spent on tribal people developments that are important but it is the human quality of the change that counts".

To ensure equality, justice and fullness of life to every citizen there should be political, social and economic institutions. In this context, special provisions had to be made for the development of the backward and weaker Urikar Naickens population.

An assessment of the present stage of development obtained among these Urikaras presents a very dismal picture. The level of their living has considerably been deteriorated. Disciplines like economic organisation, social organisation and political organisation have a positive and creative role to play in the overall development in the life of the

Urikaras. Hence, a new concern for the integrative problems of these Urikaras must be organized and steps should be taken in devising a proper technique of psycho-social approach for development.

Recently, under the Village Welfare Development Scheme, these people's opinion about starting some industry that would give them employment opportunities was enquired.

Besides making Uri and Sowrimudi, these people are now engaged in doing some agricultural work. The services of the Urikara women were mostly taken during the sowing of seedling and the services of the Urikara men were taken during the harvest season. These people are paid either in kind or in cash for such works. This practice goes on in Madurai District even now. Besides this, they rear pigs for which they have a separate

place. The Urikara women do tattooing also, in a manner very similar to that of the Narikurava women.

Recently, in Karikudi Thiru. Muthuraj from the Nadar Community has started the business of making the woollen ropes by employing these Urikara men. He

provides the raw materials to them. Thus, these Urikara men are able to earn from Rs.10 to Rs.25 in this trade. In a country like India, where economic development is done, based on a socialistic pattern of society, the economic development of these rural people cannot and should not be neglected.

CHAPTER-VI

SOCIAL ORGANISATION

The Urikara Community is distributed throughout the various districts of Tamilnadu. In each place the number of families varies from fifty to hundred. Mostly, they live in porambokku lands. That is, the land does not have a 'patta' and thus they are often threatened by the authorities concerned to evacuate the place. These people who are very poor and unable to withstand the pressures, thus, often move from place to place. They often settled nearer to the caste people of lower strata since these people do not normally object. Their settlement is usually near the far end of the cities. In some places, these people are found paying a monthly rent of Rs.10/- also. Even this meager amount they are sometimes unable to pay.

The settlement of these Urikaras is normally confined to a cluster of small huts.

A typical hut of the Urikaras consists of four wooden poles which

support the roof of the hut and slanting on both the sides. Then, the roof is found to be covered with 'Olai' or steel sheets. The hut needs periodic renovations and repairs depending on the climatic factors.

The wooden poles are sometimes disintegrated by the white ants and moths. Thus, the wooden poles need replacement every two years. If the wooden poles are not much affected they need replacement only once in four or five years. The four walls are built very strongly and it is usually found plastered with mud. These mud walls are, from time to time, plastered with cow-dung and earth. People living in T.Nagar have started using the steel sheets now, each costing Rs.15/- to withstand the weather conditions. The door of the hut is usually made up of a number of spliced bamboo wattles and is fastened by some coir serving the purpose of bolts. Only a small gap left in the mud wall serves the purpose of

both window as well as ventilator. Inside the hut, due to inadequate ventilation, most of the space is covered with a thick coating of black soot. Mostly, it is the man who does the construction of the hut whereas the women do the plastering work of the floor. Usually, the whole family including small children takes an active part in constructing the hut.

In some of the huts, above the roof, they throw up punctured tyres and other unused things. This is done simply because they do not have enough space inside the huts to assemble all things. Hence, they find the roof as a suitable place. Sometimes, they use old tin sheets and tarpaulins also for roofing.

The entrance of the hut has a door which may be small or big. The door may be made of wood or a sac or some long pieces of cloth that serves the purpose. The walls are also plastered with cow-dung both on the inner and outer sides. The huts are neither too big nor too small. It is sufficient to accommodate a family. If any relative or some known person comes they make them sit comfortably outside the house by putting a small stool or chair.

Cooking is done on one side of the hut. Sometimes, they take their bath also inside the hut since they do not have a proper place outside. To them everything is possible within their small hut. They do not seem to feel for it and are happy. These people possess earthen pots for cooking. They use aluminium tumblers and vessels for keeping water. Some people manage to get stainless steel tumblers also. Since these people could not afford to get kerosene they prefer mud-made grates placed within their house. For the wood to be used as fuel they collect the wooden pieces or branches of the trees. Almost all the huts are having kerosene lamps but seldom electrified, except in one or two cases.

Except for a very few who live in brick walled house almost all of them are found to live in the mud plastered huts. But, the general condition of living among this community is found to be in a poorly thatched hut surrounded by unhygienic environmental conditions. Most of the huts have a common wall between them.

Seeking for suitable market to sell their finished products of Sowrimudi

the Urikaras have migrated to Chennai, and started living under the shadows of trees and road sides. Slowly, they began to settle in the open lands for the past twenty years. As they are not included in the list of Backward Community and Scheduled Caste, the Urikara people were often threatened with eviction notice that they would be removed from their present residential places. This has actually taken place near Ennore of the Kanchipuram District and Guindy of Chennai and the people were, thus, threatened to evict their living places.

In connection with this, two stay orders were obtained by filing the two cases in the Court against the eviction by giving the reasons that they should not be removed from their present living places, till the authority provides the alternative places for constructing the hut.

The Urikara Naicken Community of Mathichiyam area of Madurai District have been included now under the list of Schedule Castes and issued

with the Community Certificate by the Government. About thirty families of this community dwelling in this area are also provided with the ration card by the State Government.

Inside their hut they have a small place as kitchen room. In places like T.Nagar within the hut they keep a small place for rearing pigs. In some districts like Madurai within the house they have the underground storage pots called 'Gombra' which has five feet depth. It is not usually seen as a separate one but merges with the floor of the hut. This is meant for storing the grains which they get in turn for selling the ropes for agricultural purposes. Before they came for this trade of making plaited hair they were making Uris, Kambilikayaru and Vadams and thus were paid in kind. Usually, they were paid in terms of grains in about six measures of Ragi.

So, they made use of this Gombra then. But, at present, since their trade itself has been changed it does not find its use.

CHAPTER - VII

POLITICAL ORGANISATION

The degree of literacy and political consciousness is relatively low among the Urikaras. The political situation among the Urikaras is so marked with small, autonomous, self-governing Panchayats held by their caste leaders. It is specifically related to the operation of dispute settling mechanism both in the traditional and formal settings. The formal structures may be used as a cloak to cover up traditional disputes; formal judgement merely meant to confirm decisions arrived at informally earlier. The impact of formal legal procedure in relation to the social goals of establishing 'Panchayat Raj', institutions can, thus, be clearly seen among the Urikara Naicken Community.

This community has its own Caste-Panchayat. The leaders for the Panchayat are elected by the people themselves. The Panchayat leaders are called by the name 'Nattanmai'. Each and every Urikara Community that is distributed throughout the various

districts of Tamilnadu has its own Panchayat.

Disputes regarding inter-family quarrels or regarding the marriage settlements are dealt within the Panchayat by the panchayat leaders. In this panchayat, public opinion is given preference along with the words of elders. Often, the panchayat meets to take some common decisions regarding matters of common problems like improving their standard of life which is possible through improving their standard of economy. Thus, they meet whenever they feel it necessary to settle the problems. Extreme cases of quarrels between the husband and the wife leading to divorce are also settled amicably by the Urikara Panchayat leaders. But, in some cases where both the husband and the wife are very specific in getting the divorce it is discussed in the panchayat and later in the presence of all the members it is granted. After divorce is granted they

are allowed to marry the person whom they like.

The family disputes are also settled by these Urikara leaders. They first deal with the causes that led to the quarrel and afterwards they take action to settle the quarrel amicably. Almost majority of the cases are settled by the panchayat itself and only in very rare cases they go to the police. Any member, whether it is a male or a female, who elopes with other caste person, is strictly prohibited from again entering the caste by the Panchayat leaders.

Any person who is suspected to be guilty is tried in the panchayat and the panchayat leaders passes judgement after the person has been proved guilty. But, the verdict of the panchayat leader will be final. The method of trial is conducted as follows:

Both the guilty and the so called honest have to observe a fast for a period of one week till the day of their trial by the panchayat. Till then they should lead a clean and pure life without having any sexual relationship with women, abstain themselves from

drinking and smoking but only praying to their deities. On the day of trial both the persons take a holy bath, dress themselves in new clothes and assemble in front of the panchayat leader for the trial. Then, pure ghee is brought in a new pot and is melted and heated to its boiling point over a fire made from fresh margosa wood. A coin is latter dropped into the boiling ghee. The accused person, then, will be ordered to take out the coin from the pot of boiling ghee with his right hand. The person will be accused guilty if his hand gets boils. He is proved to be innocent if he does not get any boil.

The method of trial consists not only of ghee-pot method, but also gripping a red hot iron. The accused person is, thus, ordered by the panchayat leader to grip a red-hot iron bar tightly. He is judged to be guilty when his palm gets burnt. On the other hand, if his palm remains unburnt, he is considered to be innocent. This, type of trial is meant for men.

There is a separate trial in the case of women. In the cases where a woman is found to have illegal sexual relationship with a man, she is, at first,

severely punished. As a first warning her hair is shaved off, and when it is repeated again, both the man and the woman are punished severely. That is, both should dig seven pits and take bath in them. Finally, if the woman is caught again in the act of such illegal sexual relationship, then, she is punished very severely and her tongue is burnt and she is out casted and the man is overlooked.

To maintain discipline and regularity of customs, these Urikara leaders maintain a strict rule. Thus, one

could come to the inference that the customs and practices of Urikara Naicken Community are not only primitive and peculiar but also crude and grotesque.

However, in these fast changing days, some of their customs regarding the method of punishing varies greatly. Thus, at present, as a method of punishment they are fined heavily if they are found guilty. And as a last measure they are usually out-casted if they are found to repeat the same act.

CHAPTER - VIII

RELIGION

The chief factor that differentiates caste and community is the cultural practices of people. The Urikara Naicken people are quite custom bound in their religious activities. They still appreciate and cultivate the festival spirit. Since they are Hindus they celebrate almost all the Hindu festivals. Unlike many other communities, religion is still a living force among the Urikara Naickens and they enjoy the spirit of festivals.

The Urikara Naicken people have certain unique cultural practices. They have innate belief in the spirit of the dead and they do ancestral worship. They believe in the existence of the supernatural powers. They do the ancestral worship every year. When a person dies in their community it is believed that he joins his ancestors in heaven. Thus, he is also worshipped among his other ancestors. To ward off any evil spirit, they still do the prayers of their ancestors. Before marriage also

the bride's and the bridegroom's relatives do their respective ancestral worship. When a child falls seriously ill, they worship ancestors along with the supernatural powers so that the child would be cured soon.

GODS AND GODDESSES

The Urikara Naicken people worship different Gods and Goddesses and they worship both the Saivite and Vaishnavite deities with equal respect. However, they consider Gangamma Devi as their caste deity.

They worship Lord Venkateswara with his consort Lakshmi as the Preserver and Lord Shiva as the Destroyer. Mostly, they are found to worship Amman which they consider as an important Goddess to do their Puja. For them, she represents everything in nature from the loving mother to pitiless. She has an independent cult of her own as 'Sakti'

or 'Devi'. Temple festivals are celebrated for three days

They worship, at the beginning of every enterprise, Lord Vigneshwara. They worship almost all the Gods and Goddess whether it is a marriage or any other important rites such as naming or the ear boring ceremony of the child. They worship Lord Subrahmanya also.

Deities like Kaliamma, Ellamma, and Gangamma are worshiped by the Urikara Naicken people. All the Hindu

festivals are celebrated by these people. In Gangamma Temples, they make their prayers for the sake of their family members. Supposing when a child falls seriously sick they make their prayers and once the child is cured completely they make their offerings in the form of sweet pongal to the Goddess. Sometimes, they sacrifice a fowl also. Previously, they seem to have sacrificed pigs and goats. In this manner, they worship the Goddess Durgai also.

FESTIVALS

Like other Hindus, the Urikara Naicken people also celebrate the annual Hindu festivals according to the dates of Indian calendar.

These people, inspite of their poverty, celebrate all the Hindu festivals according to their ability. For the festivals such as Diwali Pongal which comes once a year they purchase new dresses for all the members of the family. Only during such festivals these people are able to get new clothes. Otherwise, these people do not have a chance for getting new garments. Even though they do not possess enough money, they manage to get or borrow some money from their other relatives and thus celebrate the festivals.

When their houses need repairing, they just do it before pongal. On this day they clean their huts. They are really good at putting big kolams which is one of the traditional Hindu practices. They give bath to all the children and dress them up with new clothes. Sometimes, they go to temples also. Keeping sweet rice in a mud pot along with one or two sugarcane facing the sun they burn incense and camphor. After the puja they all eat together happily. In the evening, they usually go out with their family to a

cinema or to some other nearby entertaining place.

On the day of 'kanum pongal' the elder people give money to their younger ones who spend it according to their own wish. Both the younger and the elder people enjoy it well. Thus, they celebrate the pongal festival joyfully.

Similarly, during Diwali also they get new dress for all. They get some crackers. Usually the children feel very happy and proud wearing their new dress and burning some crackers. Thus, for children's sake at least these Urikaras celebrate this festival.

They celebrate other festivals also such as Sivarathiri, Karthigai Deepam but not so grandly as Deepavali or Pongal. However, they do not seem to do the Maliamavasai, in, memory of the deceased.

Thus, these people seem to be God-fearing people. They are very religious minded people and pay respect to other religions also. Even though they are simple people they have a very firm belief in the existence of the supernatural powers and are, thus, found to worship different Gods and Goddesses as mentioned above.

CHAPTER - IX

FAMILIAL CEREMONIES

I. BIRTH PRACTICES

Delivery is attended, in the present days, by a doctor in a hospital since these people are mostly migrating to city side. When a woman is conceived for the first time she is kept in her parent's house during the last month of her pregnancy. During the ninth month she is called upon to her parent's house. However, starting from the eighth month all her needs and works are attended very affectionately by her parents, sisters and brothers. They go for regular check-ups as advised by the doctor and when the labour pain comes, she is immediately carried over to the nearby hospital.

But, in the olden days, the delivery is usually attended by a mid-wife in the house itself. For a pregnant woman all her wishes are fulfilled as and when required by her. During the time of

delivery the mother is placed in seclusion. As soon as the child is born, the person who helped the mother at delivery are given liquor to consume. The mother is also given toddy or arrack. The naval string of the baby is cut-off as soon as the child is born.

The child and the mother are segregated for six to eleven days. On the sixth or the eleventh day, both the mother and the child are given a holy bath and the child is named by the elders of the family. The child is breast fed by the mother till three years. However, after two or three months the child is also given boiled rice and a little amount of nutritious diet. Since the Urikara are not very rich they could not afford to spend much for nutritious food to their children. They give the food according to their capacity.

They do the naming of child as a ceremony. That is, on the day of purification, both the mother and the child are given a bath and the child is named by an elderly person of the family. The child is put on some ornaments. However, others call the child by their own pet names also. At the time of naming the child they worship their caste-deity Gangamma

Devi. The child is brought up by both the parents as well as by the grandparents.

At the time of birth of a child, she or he is also given a few drops of liquor. During the naming ceremony either a pig or a goat is sacrificed which is eaten by all of them. In all these ceremonies, serving of liquor is indispensable.

PUBERTY CEREMONY

When a girl attains puberty she is kept aloof for seven days in one of the huts and she is given a holy bath on the seventh day. All her relatives are invited to take part in this function. The maternal uncle keeps a 'varisai', in which they keep a saree and a blouse for the girl, flowers, kungumam and chanthu. They keep different plates containing sugar or some sweets, fruits, coconuts, betel leaves with areca nut. Similarly, the other relatives who are closer to the girl may keep plates with different items.

During every month of her menstruation period, she is kept aloof and is not allowed to do any of the household duties. Only on the fourth day when she takes her oil-bath she is allowed to do the household work. However, in the case of married women, this rule is relaxed a little when there is nobody else to look after the household duties. After taking oil bath she is permitted to attend to household work. After the completion of menstruation period the floor is purified either with turmeric water or cow-dung water.

DEATH PRACTICES

When a person dies of old age, all the relatives of that person are called. The corpse is usually buried in the nearby graveyard. As soon as the relatives enter the house of the deceased they usually burst into loud wailing. In the case of women, they beat their chest and cry. The women of the house keep an oil lamp near the head of the dead body and they break a coconut and keep it near the head. They also burn some incense sticks. The body of the deceased is not carried to the graveyard until all the relatives turn up. The body is first washed and decorated with new clothes, and then it is placed on a bamboo pole consisting of two vertical poles joined by a horizontal pole of bamboo which is called as 'padai'.

In the case of the death of a married person, his wife is also given a bath and given a new saree to wear. She should have kungumam and flowers during all the sixteen days. After that she is not allowed to have all these things. She is strictly secluded during these sixteen days from attending to any of the household duties.

The body is usually carried either by the uncle or brothers-in-law. Usually, four persons carry the body. They are not allowed inside the hut for three days. In the graveyard, the body of the deceased is kept in a pit and the eldest son of the deceased puts some rice and some paise after dipping the coin in water. This custom is followed by other members also. Then, the son goes around the pit for three times followed by his relatives. All the persons who participated in the funeral will have to return back to the house of the dead person. A pig or a goat is killed and the fresh blood is sprinkled within the 'pandal'. A little blood is placed in the burial ground also. Meanwhile they light a lamp and keep it in the middle of the pond. The rest of the blood is kept just near that lamp in a vessel. The people who attend the funeral will have to smear the blood over their foreheads and sprinkle cowdung water on themselves. After bath, liquor is served and the people have sumptuous dinner.

Another custom observed is that the pall-bearers will be given a special

treatment for three days continuously. On the first day they apply butter on their shoulders. After bath, on the first day food is served in their hands, on the second day it is served in the 'Erukkan leaves' and on the third day on the floor. All these three days they are given with heavy drink.

Death is usually considered as a sort of pollution which is held from nine days to eleven days or even upto sixteen days. On all these days, the son of the deceased who is the chief mourner abstains from sexual dealing. On the sixteenth day, the 'karumathy' is held. It can be held on ninth or eleventh day also. On this day a small vessel containing castor oil is kept on some amount of cow-dung and with the help of an Arugam grass their shoulders are touched as a mark of relieving them the burden of carrying the dead body. Later on, the entire hut is sprinkled with holy water to remove the pollution and subsequently a ceremonial feast is given to the relatives.

In the Mathiyichiyam area of Madurai District, the maternal uncle / brother-in-law with a bronze Kumba bell go around the hut with the bell ringing after which they remove the screen. This is called as '*kombu irakkuthal*'.

Every year on the same day the death anniversary will be held. On this day, they pay homage to all the deceased ones of the family by offering food on a white cloth that is spread before. A lamp is lit and after showing incense and camphor, special prayers are offered to the dead ones. They clean the graveyard and light lamps. This is supposed to signify the presence of deceased persons in the next world.

The worship of the dead ancestors is usually done during the important occasions such as marriage or other familial ceremonies, as a mark of getting their blessing for good. They always show great respect in worshipping the deceased.

Thus, some of the important ceremonies done by the Urikaras are dealt within this chapter.

CHAPTER - X

LITERACY OF THE URIKARA NAICKEN COMMUNITY PEOPLE

The people of this community are mostly illiterates, (about 76% of them are illiterates). However, the present younger generation are somewhat better educated compared with the older generation whose education is of very poor standard.

The womenfolk of this community are rather interested in household performances than their studies. Moreover, the parents themselves who are always engaged in making Sowrimudi needs the help of somebody to take care of the children along with the kitchen work. Hence, the female child usually becomes the target of these works. Moreover, the female children do not care much for their studies. Thus, they go to school till fifth or sixth standard. Most of the male children also do not care for their education. Only a minority of the people have shown real interest in education. The chief reason for this is

that most of the elders of the Urikaras are uneducated and thus they failed to make the children realize the real value of the education.

However, in the present fast developing world with all the scientific advancements and modernization, they have slowly started realizing the value of education.

In the present world, these people do not find much scope for their trade of Sowrimudi'. Since they do not possess even minimum educational qualification they are unable to do any other work. Even those who have studied upto 8th standard have a very poor standard of knowledge. Thus, for anything and everything they have got to depend upon somebody's help. Both the male and female children constitute the earning members of the family. Hence, they are unable to study properly. However, in these well advanced days, the necessary of

PERCENTAGE OF LITERACY AMONG THE DIFFERENT AGE GROUPS

SI.No.	Age groups	Percentage of literacy
1.	Upto 4 years	0
2.	From 5 years to 20 years	20
3.	From 21 years to 40 years	10
4.	From 41 years to 50 years	5
5.	From 51 years to and above	2

schooling for their children is much felt by their parents.

These Urikaras who are economically weaker do not find much finance to educate their children. Besides that, even if they send their children to school the reception received there is not very enthusiastic.

As so far they have not been included under any caste they are forbidden of all the benefits rendered by the Government. Thus, they are unable to get the benefits of our Honourable Chief Minister's scheme of mid-day-meals, at the school because their teachers send these children after one or two days from the school asking to furnish community certificates. Thus, the Urikara children are forbidden of the Government's benefits of free boarding and free education and

thus they find very little place in the schools. Even those who are admitted in some other caste names since the name 'UrikaraNaicken' is not found to be included under any caste. However, the name of 'Kat Naicken' is found to be included under the list of Scheduled Tribes. Hence, some of them have given their caste as Kat Naicken.

Among these Urikaras, at present, the male generation has much felt the necessity of education so that they could understand the Government's various plans and schemes for upbringing their children in life. To read the newspaper or some other important programmes they are sincerely trying to study. Slowly the importance of education is realized by them.

SEX-WISE LITERACY

Sex	Number of persons	Percentage of literacy
Male	500	30
Female	300	4

Unless and until the Urikara people are included under some castes there would not be much scope of educating their children. As they are economically very backward they are unable to provide their children with books, slate and note books. In future, if they are included under the list of scheduled Castes or Scheduled Tribes there is more chance for the Urikara children getting education.

The Urikaras, really, wish to see their children getting good education and do something for the betterment of their community people. In this way, they hope to have a better status in the society. The total approximate percentage of literacy among the whole community was found to be only 34%. In that, the male has got 30% literacy and the female has got only 4% literacy.

Many of the Urikara men are addicted to liquor and thus a considerable part of their meagre

income is spent on liquor. In their day-to-day affairs, for everything they include liquor as an indispensable item of consumption. Their poverty is mainly due to their mode of occupation which does not possess much scope in this fashion loving days. Thus, their poverty leads to lack of education.

The spread of literacy and the realization of the value of education are absolutely to remove the exploitation and poverty which the Urikaras are facing. As liquor forms the part and parcel of their ceremonies they have become addicts to consumption of liquor.

Here again, only the spread of education can help them to reduce this habit or to eliminate it completely. However, such a spread of education must go side by side with other measures to improve their economic conditions.

Rural economic development is closely related to educational development. Program of economic development and the spread of education should go side by side if both are to be succeeded. The approach to

educate these people should be flexible so that they would follow it easily.

The Urikaras should be educated so that they have a medium of regarding personal hygiene, child care and health science. A basic education in the areas of public health, personal hygiene, child care and food habits along with culinary practices and customs are necessary. However, in the present generation, some of the Urikaras have passed SSLC and some PUC and about two or three persons have got their B.A., B.Com. and B.Sc., Degrees. Those who have completed their studies are very proud about this.

As the Urikaras are leading a nomadic life they move from one place to another for their trade. Thus wherever they go, they usually come to settle along with the caste people of lower strata. Consequently, when they join the school they give the name of the caste of other people among whom they live.

Thus, Thiru Palaniswamy, leader of the Tamilnadu Urikara Naicken Association has himself passed SSLC

by saying that he belonged to Korava caste. Similarly, Thiru Ponnaiyan, General Secretary of the community told about his experience of how he was able to do his study upto SSLC. He said that he was actually given encouragement from one of his teachers by name Thiru Esaya on seeing his interest in study. His parents and neighbours have, actually, discouraged him to study, he said. Due to familial circumstances, however, he was unable to complete his SSLC.

Recently, one of the Urikara boys have completed his B.Com. Degree. He seems to work in the Khadi-Kraft for some time. He has, actually, given his caste as 'Kat Naicken'. Similarly, another boy has completed his B.Sc., Degree.

Thus, the percentage of literacy is slowly increasing among these people. These educated boys swear of using the various schemes of the Government to up bring their economically backward people. In this regard, they are prepared to do all their best to bring their community forward.

CHAPTER – XI

PEOPLES STRUGGLES AND ORGANISATION AMONG THE COMMUNITY

In these modernized and scientifically well advanced days, Urikara Naicken's trade of making 'Sowrimudis', does not find a good scope. Further, they have to meet so many other difficulties in their trade.

First, the getting of raw-materials and secondly, the cleaning which requires sufficient water. Another difficulty is that other caste people mostly object to use the water in the public pond by these people. Hence, they have to face inadequate water supply also. This is more increased, at present, where everywhere people are faced with shortage of water supply for the routine work such as cooking, washing and bathing. The Urikara people who are living in a crude existence have to go in search of getting water for cleaning the hair. People's objection to allow these Urikaras to take water is mainly due to the water

getting contaminated by the hair filaments. Hence, they have to find a suitable place of dwelling where they would not be objected.

The next obstacle that arises in their day-to-day life is that since their children are not given bath who go on playing in all muddy places are easily prone to disease. The woman has to collect water that would hold them for one or two days to serve all purpose. In that case, they have to use the water sparingly for all purposes and hence the children are not given bath daily. Thus, the household woman, besides taking care of their children, has to overcome these difficulties also. The next thing is that the children being small and playful often disturb the work of their parents. However, when the children are sent to school their work goes on undisturbed. Even though their community leaders are representing

them in their Association which is taking care of them. Still they wish that the Government should take initiative in giving their children proper education and positive encouragement for their successful carrier in life.

The Urikara Community living in such crude existence has been witnessed by some of the voluntary organisations like the 'Board for Education for Liberation, known as 'Vizhipu Kalvi Variyam', in Tamil. The Urikaras have their own 'Association', called the 'Tamilnadu Urikara Naicken Community Association'. This association form a useful means to understand the Urikaras role of social participation and other leadership patterns that are practiced by the Urikara Community people's society.

Their Association has made its representation through its president Thiru Palaniswamy who has submitted a memorandum to the State Government stressing the following six point demands:

1. That the Urikara Naicken Community be included in the list of Scheduled Tribes. When

the Revenue Inspector at one time contacted the Urikara people to know why they want themselves to be included under Scheduled Tribes, these people told 'exclusion' of their community as the main reason.

2. That they be given preference in educational trainings and employment opportunities until they are included in the list of Scheduled Tribes.
3. That a part of the hair offered to the temples be provided to them free of cost.
4. That the aid of interest free loans be given by the Government.
5. That an alternative employment opportunity be provided since the 'Sowrimudi' trade is fast losing its scope, now-a-days, due to the advent of industrialization and modernization.
6. That the provision of pattas for the house land be given without considering the Community-Certificate until they are included in the Caste list.

BOYCOTT OF THE ELECTION

The Urikara Naicken Community Association has taken the decision to boycott the by-election, for expressing the dissatisfaction over the lethargic attitude of the State Government, inspite of their submission of the memorandum. The Urikaras are surrounded by various forces like ruling class, state officials, ruling party, small and big opposition parties and upper castes. Most of the Urikaras are working as contract workers. They are engaged particularly in piggetry. Inspite of it, they cannot run the piggetry centers for their own and even if they have own pigs they cannot sell them directly to the market.

In the above said oppressive condition, this minority caste of small magnitude came out bravely to fight against the above said forces for deriving their basic rights.

DISTRICT ASSOCIATIONS

To explain the actual conditions of the Urikara Naicken Caste, the Association has taken the decision to spread the flag containing the 'Uri', as the symbol. Hence, for this purpose they have decided to build the District Associations through which the enrolment of the memberships to the Association will be made in every village. Leaders of the two districts, Chennai and Kanchipuram held elections for electing the office bearers for each of the two districts. Thus, two separate District Associations were created. Following this, the District Associations are being framed by which the people of this caste are organized into the Association. The first flag of the Association was hoisted at the village Naduvakkarai in Chennai District on 14.02.1982. Successive hoisting of the Association Flags in the Villages of the two Districts with the aim of making awareness among the Urikaras are being conducted while they are making appeal to the State Government to consider their demand and early action.

SUMMARY & CONCLUSION

The present work submitted represents the findings of the Research Work done on the Urikara Naicken Community. This work was carried out by making regular field visits and following other advanced methodologies.

Questionnaires were prepared covering their socio-economic aspects. The objective of the study is to highlight some of the points regarding their various organisations and customs they follow and their socio-economic problems.

As absolutely there was no first hand information available regarding this community, the study was planned on the basis of available resources viz., data elucidated through questionnaires, direct interviews and other observation methods. The study was concentrated mainly on the socio-economic life of the community.

The Urikaras are found distributed in Madurai, Tirunelveli, Ramanathapuram, Coimbatore and Nagercoil Districts of Tamilnadu and

some are found in Chittoor of Andhra Pradesh and a few in Kerala also.

With the advent of industrialization and modernization, they have become economically weaker section since their trade of 'Sowrimudi' does not find a scope of improving their economy. Hoping to find a better marketing facility about 60% of them have come to Chennai city some ten to fourteen years back. The language of these people is a mixture of Telugu, Kannada and Tamil. However, Telugu language is more predominant than the other two languages cited above.

They have got their traditional name, the 'Urikara Naickens', from their trade of making 'Uris'. However, during the course of their life, they have stucked on to other alternative trades of making of plaited hair since with the advent of machines and motors their previous work of making coir ropes and vadams has lost its scope.

The social organisation of the Urikaras shows family as the basic unit. In Chennai city these people are found

distributed at various places like Naduvakkarai, Sharmanagar, Beasant Nagar, Kodambakkam, Avadi and Villivakkam. This community is mostly living in a poorly constructed thatched hut which is made of, by the combined efforts of all the family members. Usually, for cooking they use earthen vessels while aluminium vessels for drinking and eating. They use tumblers and plates which are also of aluminium made. Since they could not afford to get kerosene, they use mud-grates kept inside the house.

The family pattern is of nuclear, immediate or extended or joint family. They have got both consanguineal and affinal kinship ties. No parallel cousin marriage is allowed and marriages are strictly endogamous and family as such has got patrilineal descent and the residence is patrilocal. The inheritance of property is usually through male line. Respectable kinship terms are used by these people according to their age and status.

Attempts have been made to cover the life pattern of the Urikaras including their social organisation, political organisation, and economic organization.

Different familial ceremonies such as pregnancy and child birth, naming of the child, ear boring ceremony, and puberty ceremony are also dealt within a chapter.

As regards their marriage system, they are usually, monogamous. Usually the women consider marriage as a permanent union of a man and a woman for the purpose of having children and to continue a line of generation through children born out of wedlock. It is believed, generally, that the adult men and women have the moral duty to get married in due course of time and beget children for maintaining the line of descent in the family.

However, when a woman does not beget a child her husband can remarry with her consent. Usually, he marries the sister of his wife or some other women within their community. Before marriage, there is an official engagement taking place where the bridegrooms party offers four betel leaves with four areca nuts with Rs.52.50 along with a 25 paisa coin as 'Parisam', placed in a Thambulathattu. This parisam is exchanged over a pot of liquor as a promise made by both the parties in the presence of Caste

Panchayat leader and the Panchayat member. And a stone is given by the bride's party as an indication that they will remain as strong as a stone in their decision. Usually the date for the marriage is fixed up on the same day.

If, on the other hand, the bride elopes with another man or does not want to marry him those who drank liquor on the date of engagement assemble together and the girls party will give back the 'Parisam' and get back the stone from the bride groom's party in the presence of the Caste Panchayat leader and members. Similarly, if the bridegroom's party wants to break the engagement they have to convince all those present on the engagement day and return the stone given by the bride's party and get back the twenty five paise coin as a mark of indicating that the girl is free to marry the person whom she likes.

The elderly persons are given due respect. The death is also considered as a normal part of life. All the relatives of deceased person are informed about the death. Usually, the body is buried in the nearby burial ground and the rites are performed. The members, after they

return from the burial ground, usually take bath. A pig or a goat is sacrificed and the fresh blood is sprinkled within the pandal. A little blood is placed in the burial ground. A lamp is lit. The people who attend the funeral will have to smear the blood over their forehead and sprinkle cow-dung water on themselves.

After bath, liquor is served and the people have sumptuous dinner. Usually, the body of the deceased person is carried on by his or her uncle and the brother-in-law. These four pall-bearers are not allowed inside the house for three days. On the 16th day, they do the 'karumathy' or the purification ceremony during which there is a peculiar custom observed. A small vessel containing castor oil is placed in the middle of a little cow-dung. With the help of an 'Arugam pul' (grass) the relatives just touch the hands of the pall-bearers starting from their shoulders up to their fingers. This is done to remove their burden of carrying the corpse.

Regarding their religion, they are all Hindus. They worship Ganga amma Devi as their caste deity. However, they worship other Goddesses like

Kaliamman and Ellamman. They worship Gods like Lord Venkateswara, Lord Siva, Lord Ganesha and Lord Muruga. Usually, they worship all the above said Gods and Goddesses during marriage and other important rites. Basically, they worship the Goddess of Saivite sect even though they worship Vaishnavite deities as well.

Ancestral worship is also regularly held. They celebrate almost all Hindu festivals like Diwali, Pongal, Sivarathri, Krishna Jayanthi, Pillayar Chathurthi and Adi Kiruthikai. Only during Diwali, and Pongal they purchase new clothes for all the family members and celebrate happily. The deity differs for each family. The deity of one's sister's husband will differ from his own.

The Urikara Naicken community has its own Caste Panchayat with the leaders and their members. Any person who is suspected to be guilty is subjected to trial in the Panchayat and the leader of the Panchayat passes the judgement if the person is proved to be guilty. The cases that are usually held for Panchayat are those having illegal sexual relationship either in the case of men or women. A woman is usually

warned for her bad conduct and if she is found often in this act of sexual relationship her tongue is burnt and she is out casted. If anybody disobeys the rules passed by the Panchayat leader he or she is usually excommunicated from their caste.

These Urikaras are usually god fearing people. As the Urikaras are economically weaker they are unable to improve their standard of life. Their settlement pattern is poor and unhygienic. It is a fact due to the illiteracy of the Urikaras they are unable to get better jobs. They have their own traditional way of doing ceremonies on such occasions as marriage, birth or death.

However, in the present generation, there is a slow change in their traditional activities along with the gradual change in their outlook, world view, attitude to values and philosophies of life.

The very ethos of traditional culture marked with homogeneity, simplicity, co-operation, leisurely life is the characteristics of the Urikara people. The level of aspiration and lust for their improvement in life seem to

increase in marked degree. The sense of jointness and co-operation, love for the traditional code of conduct and social customs and taboos are still observed among the Urikaras.

The idea underlying the development scheme of the Urikara people is to remove their socio-economic problems to a certain extent, with the utmost co-operation of these people. Importance should be given to the concentrated development of these people in different fields. Those who know the hard conditions of the Urikara people will realize that they have come to light a new spirit of life and also co-operation among these people. While what has been achieved is little compared to what has yet to be done. However, these people also try to improve their standard by educating their children. It is to be hoped that the physical and material resources of these Urikara people may be made with success in the near future.

The present work represents to a certain extent the ethnographic status of the Urikara, people. Thus, detailed analyses of the existing data speak for themselves about their present situation.

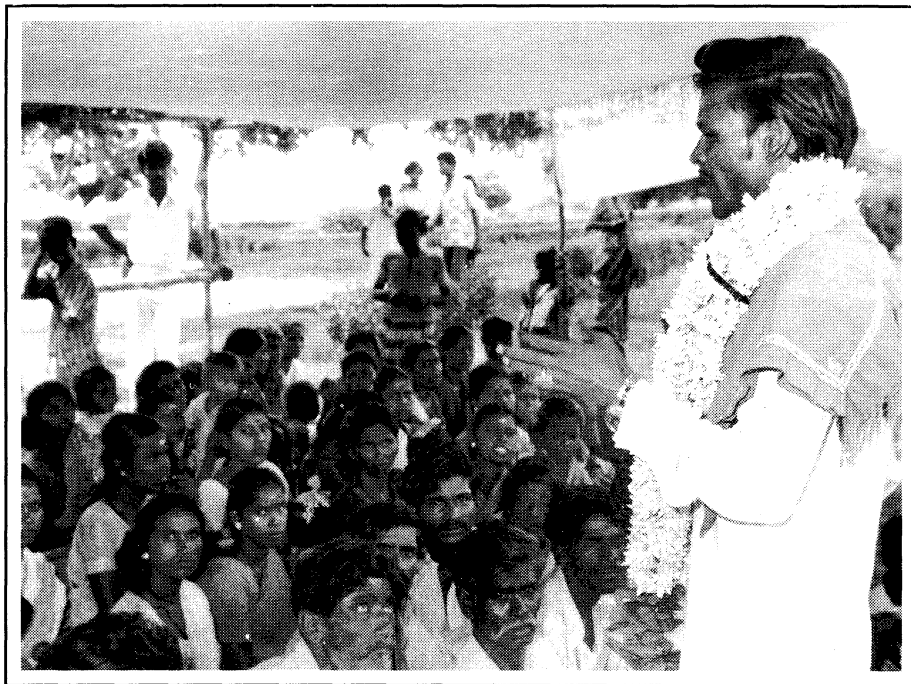
The people themselves are trying to improve in all their aspects of life though trying to get the State Government's Assistance. In this way, voluntary organisations such as BEL (Board for Education and Liberation) are taking active interest to improve their standard of life.

The inclusion of Urikara Naicken Community of Mathichiyam area of Madurai District, under the list of Schedule castes and issued with the Community Certificate by the Government and the provision of Ration card to these people by the State Government, is a clear sign of gradual improvement brought in the life of Urikara Naicken Community.

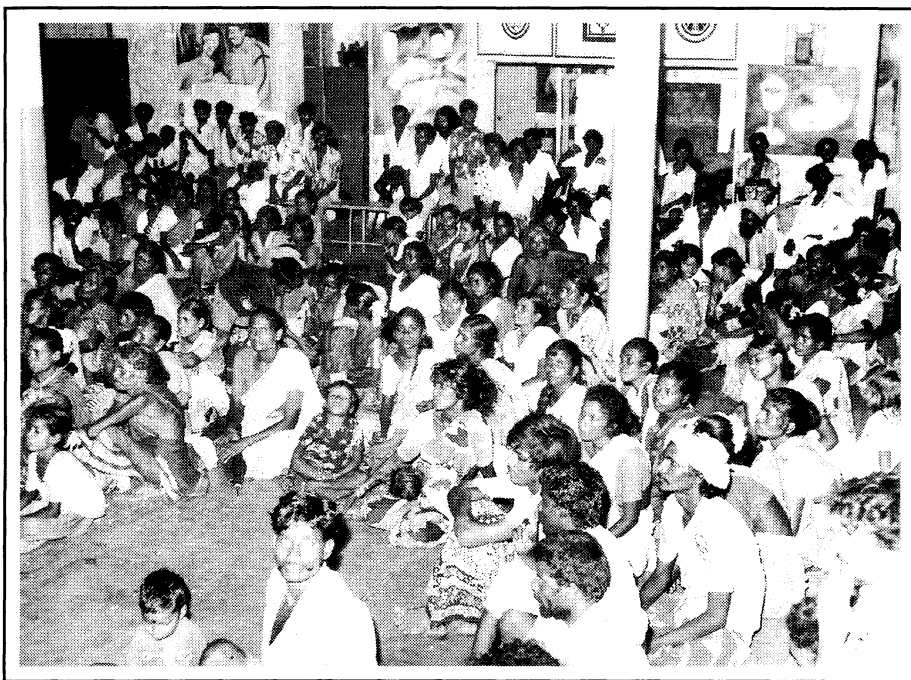
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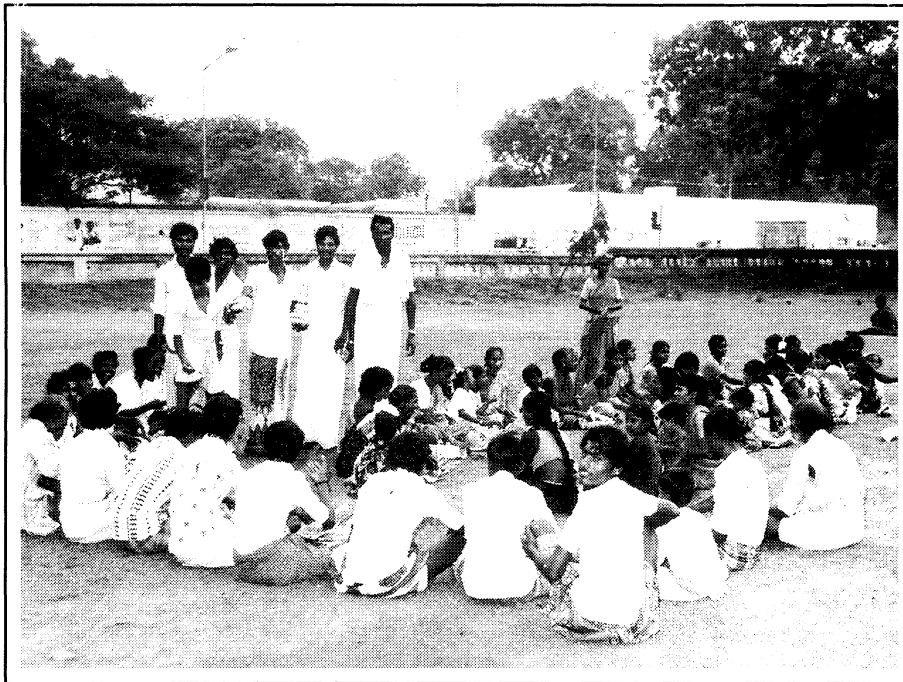
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The Urikara President addressing the Community



The Urikara Naicken Community attending the meeting



Gathering of Urikara Naicken Community



Urikara Naicken women with children



Urikara man & woman plaiting the hair in
the Mathichiyam area, of Madurai District.



Urikara man merchandizing the Sowrimudi,
Kambalikayaru with Conch & Mask (to ward off evil powers).



Urikara man combing the Sowrimudi with
Indigenous combing Brush



Urikara man displaying the finished product during sale



Iron cage for keeping Cat & Mongoose



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